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SPACE GAMER

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SPACE GAMER

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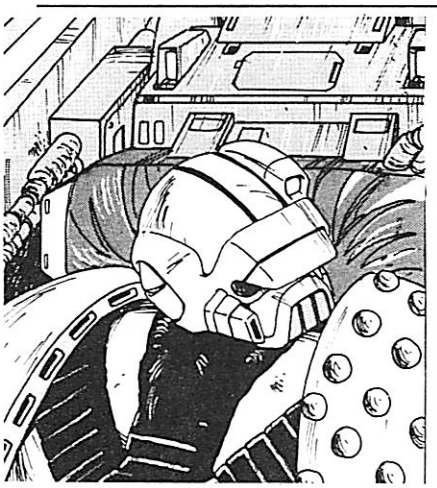

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Editorial

It's incredible to see how mired in their ways the gaming industry has become. Most companies' ideas of innovative and new include editing their products, a new cover and hardbacking the game. Come on people, this is not innovation, this is creating a useable, saleable product. If a product wasn't edited the first time around, why was it published to begin with. If the cover art was a bad selling point, could this be the only thing that killed its sales; isn't the game's contents more important? Most of the games I play a lot do not even have covers anymore. They've worn off! But then, the question of contents appears to be moot.

In the paperback market — I just found this out too — the artist for the cover of the book often makes more than the writer and the editor. Even more amazing (and this is often true in the gaming market) is the fact that the artist gets to keep the art and resell if for second and beyond rights. As we all know, once a writer gets something in print he can seldom reprint it somewhere else and get paid for it without being sued. Something is definitely screwy here. Don't we buy books and RPGs for the contents? I always thought the writing was the most important thing. The 'trap' everyone is falling into is to ignore this fact. About the only company that doesn't seem to fall into the 'trap' of gorgeous covers and flashy art to sell their products is Stellar Games (who produce good games) — and if you said "Who Games?", then you can understand why the rest of the companies like the 'trap'. If RPGs are only bound by your imagination, why are you, as buyers, bound by the cover art. My belief is that you aren't. My belief is that there's more going on than companies realise. If good art and nice pictures were all that mattered, it wouldn't be long before the only games companies left in the business would be Disney, Warner Bros., Bashki Productions and the Hugh Hefner companies. But the problem is the contents are often ignored by RPG companies.

I can't believe it when I see companies selling their errata. Two companies in the business even have magazines that they print errata in for you to buy. The company made the mistakes with bad editing the first time around, why should you pay for their corrections. They should have been done before the game was put to final press. But bad or even no editing is becoming standard in this market. Again it seems that the industry is complacent and has no eye to moving forward. Of course, the biggest problem of companies following others like sheep needs to be brought up.

Why is it that every company in the business has decided to go to hardbacking their games. Don't they realise how troublesome it is. To make a character sheet, you have to break the spine or tear out the sheet and wreck the book. Why the change?

Very often, the companies say that they are going to hardback to show that they have a higher interest in that particular game system. To prove that they are going to continue to back the game, a company puts it in hardback. This, as you can well figure, is assuredly not the reason. The reason is because hardbacks are selling; plain and simple, that's the major reason. Another reason is probably profit. In the book market, hardbacks make nearly 3 times the profit margin of paperbacks and nearly 10 times the actual profit of a paperback. Could this be any different in the gaming market? Companies don't want you to think this, but I wonder. The idea that a company is going to give more support to a hardbacked game than a softbacked game is ludicrous. Who would believe it? And yet at GenCon, that was the excuse. A scary side not is that with the hardback populatrity that is booming, I've heard rumors of some new hardbacks for 1990. But tell me, do these sound like the company is going to give them more support or just trying to make a fast buck. The titles *rumored* were Tunnels and Trolls, Ogre, Ghostbusters, Boothill, Star Frontiers, Villains and Vigilantes, SpaceMaster, Star Fleet Battle's Commander's SSD books, GURPS, Mechwarrior, everything Palladium produces, and the James Bond Game. Remember that these were just rumors so don't bug your retailer for them, yet. Doesn't it boggle the mind?

I guess the bottom line is that the gaming industry is steadfast in their ways because you, the buying populace, let them. If you started buying better edited products with bad covers or softbounds instead of hardbounds or any combination which produced a good game, not just a huge profit, the companies might change their ways (or fold, we can't ignore this catastrophic possibility). But for now, maybe you shouldn't worry about it. Be blind sheep and enjoy your new hardback edition of whatever you're playing with the neat-o cover. There'll be a hardback errata book with 6 pages of errata, an Elmore cover, and a steep price coming in a couple of weeks.

Barry Osser

A side note to those who care. If you've read the latest "Runes" in White Wolf 17, and I know someone out there must have besides me, you will notice that the Editor makes the rather uninformed statement that White Wolf may be the only independent magazine left in the market. Throughout his editorial, he continuously ignored the existence of SpaceGamer. Even with its eratic publication problems, it still produced three issues between Origins '88 and '89. Check your facts before you swallow the rest of your leg, Sir! We're still here, and we don't need "enamel paper" to survive. Just quality! ■

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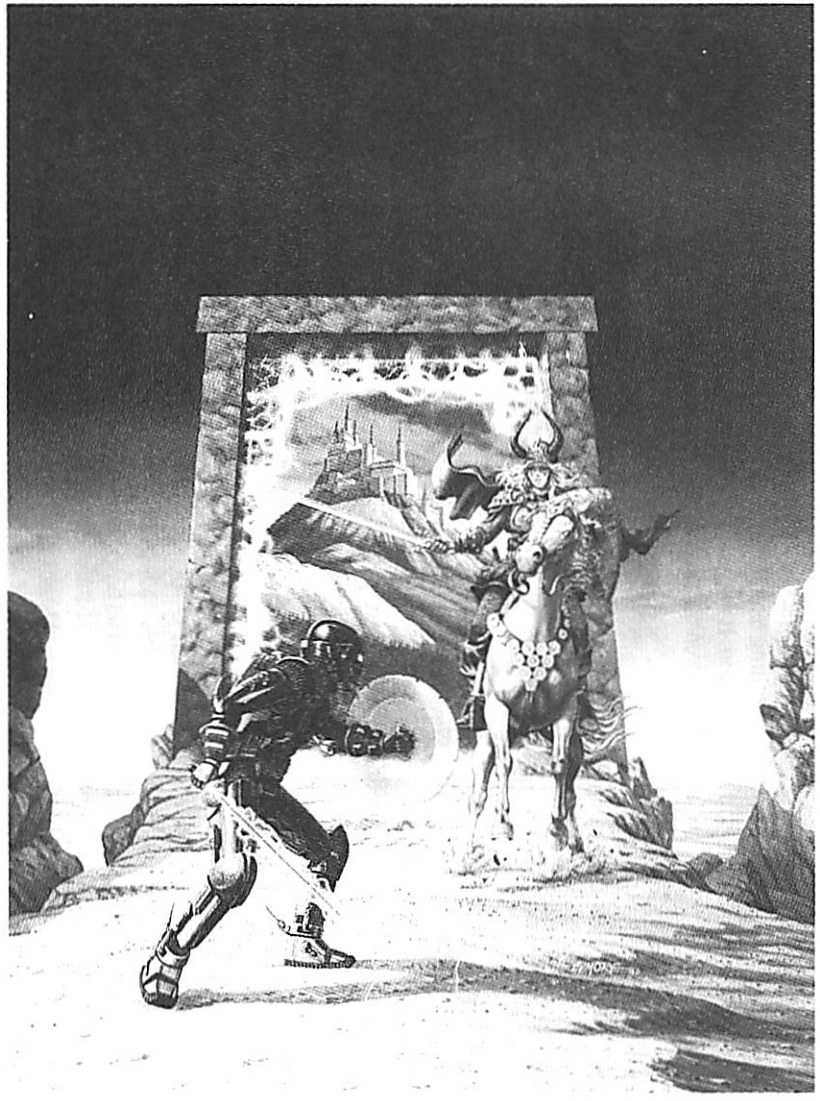

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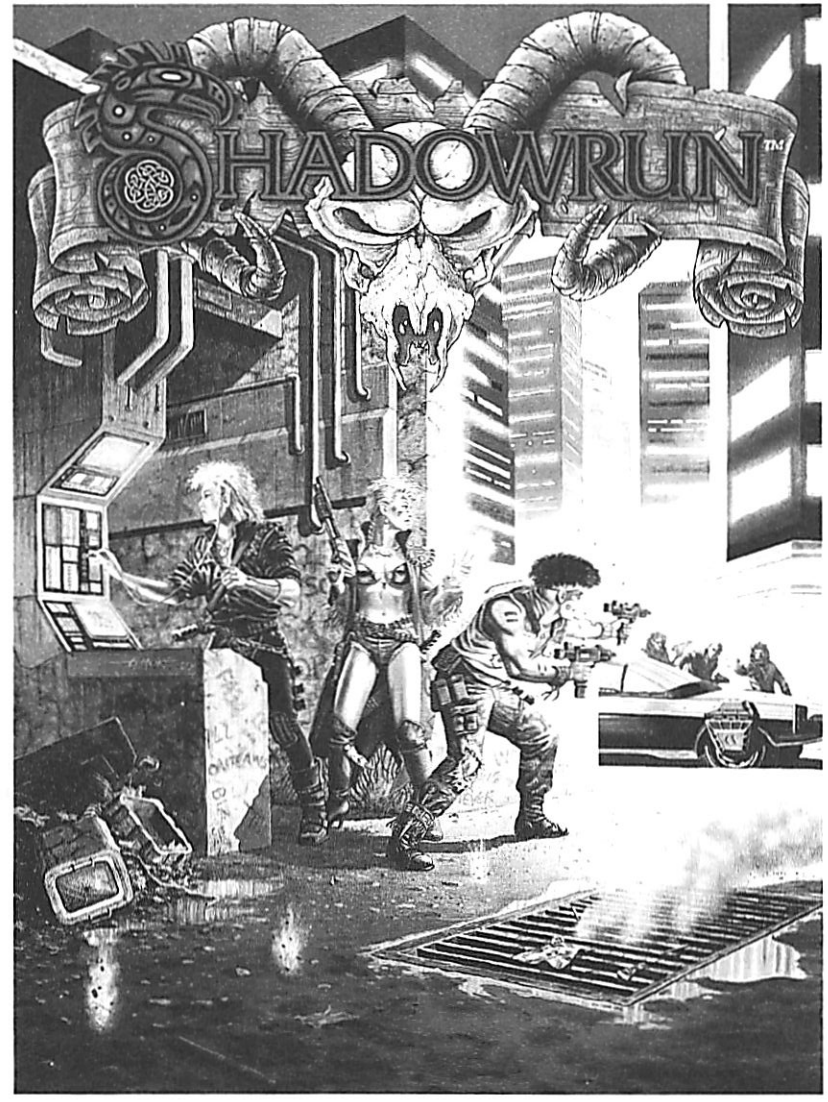

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MOVING BEYOND ARCHETYPES

> **"Orks is peoples too."**
>
> Chuck-Chuck Razool,
> *orkish decker*

By Tom Dowd

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The 16 Player and 22 Non-Player Archetypes provided in the *Shadowrun* gamebook are provided for two reasons. The first is as a 'quick start' so that new Players and Gamemasters can grab their favorites and start playing with a minimum of character generation hassle. The second is to provide a typical character of that type for reference when players and Gamemasters later begin designing their own characters. Every character in the Shadowrun universe is unique, and his abilities, attributes and skills should reflect that. Real people are not Archetypes, real people are, well... real people.

Real people have full and complex lives. They have reasons for doing things, passions that drive them, and fears that hold them back. They are products not only of their genes, but of their society as well. Your goal should be to make your *Shadowrun* character, or your character in any other game, as real as you are.

Society in *Shadowrun* is about as complex as it gets. Take a step into the streets of Seattle, circa 2050, and take a deep breath. Now that you've finished coughing, take a look around. Look at the people. Look at how they dress, how they move. Listen to how they speak. They belong there as much as the Space Needle, Matchstick's Bar and Grill, or your own character.

The Archetype is the jumping off point. With each we included a short first-person statement that Archetype might make about his life. Again, they've been included as a reference and should not be taken as gospel. It is certainly possible to have a character who isn't as arrogant as the Elven Decker, or as language-slurring as the Ork Mercenary. In fact, we think it's necessary. (Can you imagine how dull a world it would be if every Street Samurai or Burned-Out Mage spoke exactly like the Archetype given?)

The key to moving beyond the Archetype is history. Everyone has a past, and it is that past that shaped that person and made him unique. Obviously, it may be impossible to create a background for your character that is as rich and diverse as your own, but that sort of depth isn't really necessary. What is required is that some basic, pertinent, questions be answered.

Below you'll find some questions, and some thoughts about answers that should put you on the right track. Use them as guidelines, and then come up with your own. If you're not careful, Archetype can come to mean Stereotype, and that would be a pity.

> Why has your character chosen to do what he's doing?

Why is he a Street Samurai, a Decker, a Rockergirl, or a Former Wage Mage? What led him to become what he is today? People rarely become what they are out of apathy; something usually drives them in a specific direction. It may be circumstance, or a life-long dream, but there is usually something. Revenge? Hero-Worship? Greed? The Thrill Of It All?

Why he's who he is is very important because it affects who he will become.

> Why does he keep doing what he's doing?

Let's face it, shadowrunning is dangerous. Sure it can be fun, but those who do it solely for the thrill are probably psychotic, and certainly not long for this world. Greed is probably the most prevalent, but not the only reason. The reason that your character started shadowrunning could be the reason he keeps doing it, but it need not be. Why it changed could be as significant as the reason itself

> What is his goal in life?

As important as his past and present, is your character's future. What does he want out of life? Is it to simply live until the next sunrise, or become the best he can at what he does? There are many possibilities, and one of them is that he does not have a goal. Many shadowrunners are caught up in the violent here and now and don't look beyond the next sunrise. Hopefully they'll someday find a way out of their vicious circle and find something worth living for. Every person needs to strive for something. They need something to look forward to, a reason to grow. Without that goal our lives become stagnant and barely worth living.

> What's his family like?

Like it or not, we are all ultimately a product of our family. Even if the influence is purely genetic, there's a lot of our parents in us. What did your character's parents do for a living? What are they doing now? Does he have sisters or brothers? What are their lives like? Do they like what he's doing, hate it, or even know about it?

Does he have a family of his own? Why not? How about a 'significant other'? Why not? Remember, 'I wouldn't want to hurt someone else' and 'I can't afford to in my line of work' are pretty worn out excuses in the role-playing world.

> Who are his friends?

Even in the paranoia-ridden, runner-eat-runner world of shadowrunning a person needs friends, people to turn to in time of need. Your character's Contacts are assumed to be his friends, or at the very least neutral acquaintances. Why are these people his friends? What have they done to deserve his trust, and vice-versa?

Contacts have backgrounds and histories too, and all the questions listed here pertain equally to them as well as your character.

Remember too, that the other characters in his shadowrunning ring are probably his friends as well. If they weren't, could he trust them enough to watch his back, or protect his body while he travels astrally?

> Who are his enemies?

Who he hates and is hated by says as much about him as who he loves. Why they hate him is even more important.

> What has influenced his life?

There are many influences in the

world that touch the lives of *Shadowrun* characters. The reach of powerful entities, living or corporate, extends down into the street and often touches, and alters, many a life. Some of these influences, and associated possibilities are listed below:

—A Mega-Corporation.

They can help as easily as hinder him. Directly or indirectly an action of theirs may have influenced him temporarily, or permanently.

—A Racial Group.

Being part of the *Awakened* community could very well be a greater influence on his life than anything else. Remember, though Orks, Trolls, Elves, and Dwarves have no real culture of their own (having been around for only forty years or so) each are unique in their physical appearance and natural ability. Bigotry and racism is unfortunately as common in 2050 as it is today, though the focus of it has been redirected to the *Awakened*. How has being one of the *Awakened*, or interacting with them, influenced your character?

—A Non-Player Character

A single person could have had a great influence on your character's life. He could be a current Contact, or someone who is long dead. He might not even be powerful; but just somebody who, for good or bad, made a lasting impression. Who is this person and what did he do?

Remember also that a Non-Player Character doesn't have to be human, or even alive.

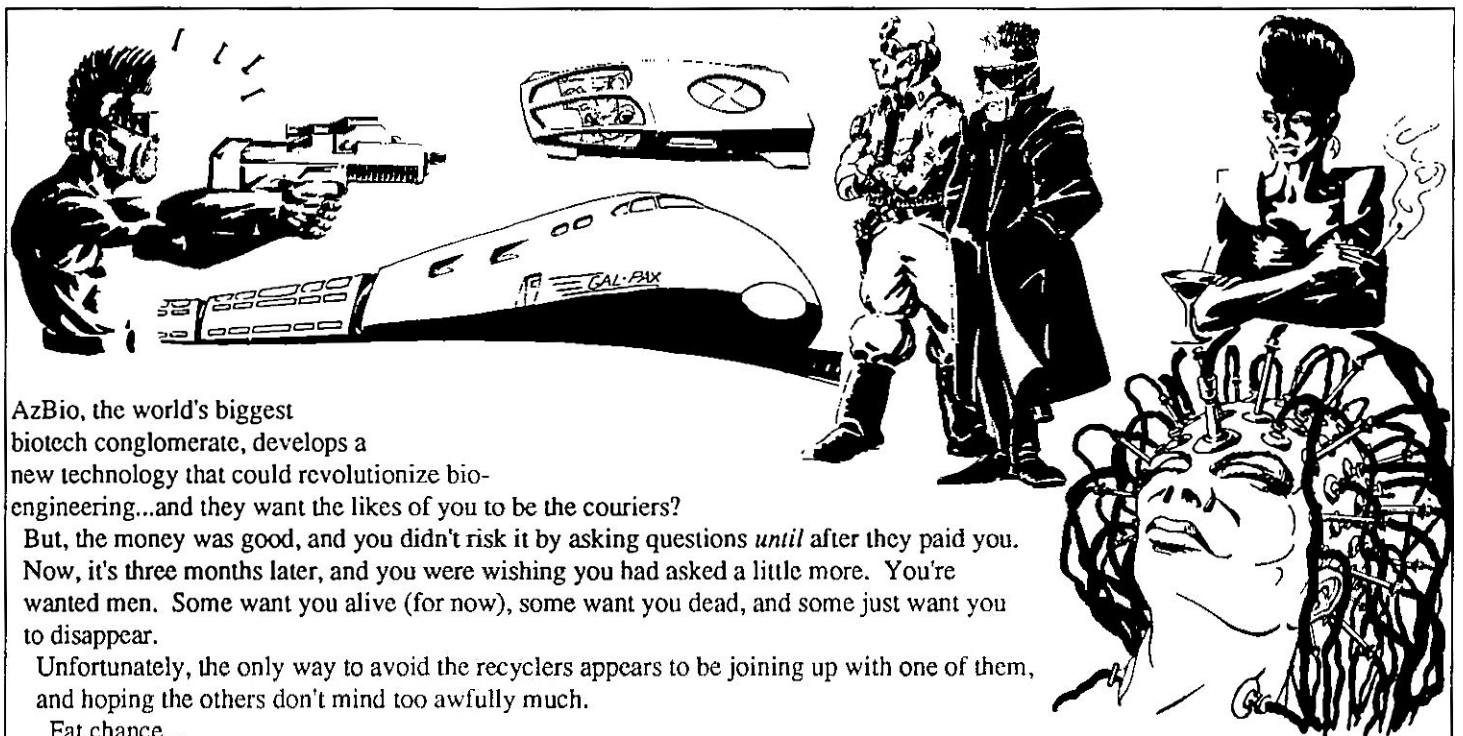
—A Government

One of the various national or local governments could have done something to influence your character. Remember, even though *Shadowrun* takes place in an age of corporate domination, they do not hold complete control over the world governments. They are able to exert a tremendous amount of influence, but cannot dictate.

> What is he like psychologically?

What are his passions, his loves? Does he have any obsessions, inhibitions, superstitions, or phobias? What's his temperament? Is his public manner different from his private manner? Most people act differently depending on whom they are with and what they are doing. The Former Company Man who is all business on a run could be relaxed and jovial where he feels safe. Is your character any different? Why?

Hopefully, these ideas and suggestions will get you thinking about ways to flesh out your character. Read a good genre novel and see how that author uses some of the general concepts I've outlined above to flesh out his characters. If it's good enough for him, it's good enough for the rest of us.■



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Unfortunately, the only way to avoid the recyclers appears to be joining up with one of them, and hoping the others don't mind too awfully much.

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CYBER-SLANG

By Mike Straus

Think you're kick? Think you're state of the art? Think you're ready to hang with the A-Boys and the Boosters? The Fringe can be a hazard if you don't got the know and part of the know is the word. If you're going to walk the edge, you got to know the slang. One of the important parts of playing any Cyberpunk game is "Cyber Slang", the catch phrases and code words that make up life in the street. A good knowledge of this terminology will make any Cyberpunk game a lot more fun. With out it, well... You're just posing.

In this article I have tried to make a complete list of all the slang that has appeared in the several Cyberpunk books that I have read. This list is by no means exhaustive. However, it is a start. **SO LET'S ROCK!**

AI	Artificial Intelligence. A Computer capable of independent creative thought. AI's exist, but have no rights as citizens. Rumors exist of fugitive AI's, using their knowledge of Cyberspace to hide in empty Net space.
A-Boys	A type of Boostergang whose motif is a certain Animal.
Black ICE	Computer security measures designed to Kill or incapacitate jacked in Net Runners. See "ICE".
Ballerinas	A catch phrase for Reflex Boosted Female Assassins in the employ of a major Corporation.
BOPPER	A Robot.
Big BOPPER	Artificial Intelligence, usually a term used to describe Military A.I.s.
Brain Tap	An implanted device that allows the transmission of information directly from the Brain to a Computer and Vice Versa.
Bounts	Bounty Hunters.
Booster	Any member of a gang that affects Cyberwear, Leather clothing and Violence as a way of life.
Clone	A genetically identical duplicate of any life form. See Doll, Meat Bop.
CORPSE	Corporate Security Expert. Term for Assassins in employ of a Corporation.
Combat Drugs	Any one of a series of Designer Drugs created to increase Speed, Stamina and Reflex timing.
CHOOH	("Choo") Streetslang for Alcohol, as used in Vehicle Power Plants.
Clavie	Any person who lives in an Enclave.
Chromer	Street slang for Heavy Metal Rock fans.
Chromatic	A type of Heavy Metal Rock, characterized By heavy electronics, simple rhythms and Rock violent lyrics.
Cinema	A Movie, usually refers to pre-Net films made in Hollywood.
Cowboy	A Net Runner.
Cyberspace	The "Landscape"of the Net as visualized By the users.
Disk	Record, recording; a laser disk.
"Dorphs"	A designer drug that increases Healing rate and limits fatigue, also called DERMS.
Deck	A portable Computer allowing interface of a Net Runner and the Net.
Doppler	From the German word Doppleganger: To have one's personality placed in to the Net and then later placed in to someone or something else. See Flatline, Ident.
Dadie	Another name for Information/ Skill chipware.
Duck Class	Also called a Duck, any person who caries more weapons then necessary or who must Character have one of every type of weapon avalible.
Download	To transmit Information from someone else's Computer to yours, usually from a larger Computer, or Mainframe to a smaller one; usually without their permission.
Dinks	Any member of a rival Boostergang.
DEBS	Transvestites, Males posing as females or females posing as males. A type of Poser Gang.
DOLL	An Artificial life form designed for a specific purpose, like Combat or Assassination. Also called Replecents. See Clone, Meat Bop.
Enclave	Corporate subsidized housing complex, also called THE PROJECTS.
Fate Meat	Someone who is bound for the Body banks. "It is my fate to be Meat".
The Fringe	The edges of society, Blasted out ruins and endless deserts, where the Nomads hang out.
Flatline	(Flatline Construct). A simulated personality on a memory chip or module, usually of a REAL person. See Doppler, Ident.
Flatlined	Braindead, as in a flat EEG scan.
Flickerclading	A synthetic plastic material impregnated with fiberoptics and temperature guages, designed to respond to skin temperature, pulse rate and blood content. A 21st century mood ring.
Flicker Clad	A substance used to protect robots from adverse environments, also called Bopper Cloak
Go LEO	To make a trip into low Earth Orbit, to visit one of the inner space stations.
Gyro	Small One/Two Person Aerogyro helicopters.
Ghoulies Ghoul -Children	A term for clones made from people already dead, tend to have Gray skin. See clone.
Gutter Jumpers	Claim Jumpers, Squatters. Any person who inhabits a building or area that has been deemed Unsafe By the Police.
Glitter Folk	Rich people, People who have nothing but time and money.
Glitter Clothes	Clothing made from Flickerclading.
Gothics	A type of Poser Gang whose motif is death and old Black and White Horror Movies.
Hydro	Hydrogen Fuel, or any person crazy enough to take Hydrogen Fuel as a drug.
Hardware	The Physical workings of a Computer or other device. The Guts of technology.
Hardwired	Any Individual with a Brain Tap capable of directly accessing a Computer or The Net.
Happy Cloak	A cloak or vest made from Flickerclading, with built in Biomonitor, watch, calander, Note Book, Direction Finder and other Helpful systems. A portable Office.
ICE	Intrusion Countermeasure Electronics. Computer security measures, usually referring to

	ANY method of denying electronic access to a Computer.
Input	A girlfriend.
Ident	Short for Identity or Ident cube, any person who has had their personality placed in to The Net, the Software the Personality is stored on is called an Ident cube. See Flatline.
Jacked-in	Plugged into Cyberspace via a brain tap.
Jam	To fight, as in "let's Jam". Also to run away from something "lets jam out of hear".
Jamming	The act of Sexual Intercourse.
Keyboard	Streetslang for a Computer interface deck with manual keys, also a Workstation.
The Know	Knowledge or information. What you are in after reading this article.
Knife Bullets	Armor piercing shells.
Moddie	Personality Modifier.
Meat Puppet	A person who rents their body out for various types of "work", their consciousness either suppressed or in cyberspace, the body controlled By another person or Computer.
Mnemonic	A general term describing anyone who uses a brain implant as a secure electronic vault.
Meat Bop	A vat grown Life form with computer "Designed" memory and personality, expensive play toys. See Doll, Clone, Meat Bop Parts.
Moddie	Anyone who has been Biologically, Electronically or Mechanically altered or enhanced.
Meat Bop Parts	A vat grown Life form designed to supply body parts for those who can afford it. Used to extend someone's life span. See clone, Vat job.
Module	An optical memory chip, Memory ware.
Muscle Boy Girl	A person with extreme Biological enhancement of strength.
Ninja	A freelance assassin, usually highly modified
Netrun	To interface with the Net and use it to enter secure systems.
Net Nerd	A Net Runner who spends more time in the Net then in the real world
Ninja Boy/Girl	Another term for a Solo
The Net	The Global Computer Net.
Output	Boyfriend.
Polymer one-shot	Any type of cheap plastic pistol, usually small caliber.
Posergang	Any group whose members all affect a specific look, style or body sculpt job.
Razor Boy/Girl	A person with bladed weapons of various types implanted into their body.
Ripperdoc	Surgeon specializing in implanting illegal Cybernetics.
Ronin	A freelance mercenary or assassin, also called Solo.
Rockerboy/ Girl	Freelance Musician or stage performer whose message is usually Anti-Corporation.
Samurai	A Corporate Assassin or Mercenary. See Ballerina, Corpse.
Stud	Also "studding in", "studding". To plug into any vehicle or machine By direct neural link.
Software	A Computer program, usually stored on some form of hardware.
Squid	Superconducting Quantum Interface Device. A sophisticated Atomic probe capable of reading supposedly "erased" memory from ANY electronic or optical device.
State of the Art	To be hipper than Hip, to be on the edge.
Tag	A name or handle. A trade mark, refers to a type of spray paint art popular amongst gang members. To grab or take something. "Hey ya wanna Tag that disc for me"
Tagged	Equipped with an electronic tracking device. Recognized, spotting someone in disguise. "I had him tagged as a cop long ago".
Upload	To transmit material from your computer to someone else's, usually from a smaller Computer to a larger one. See download.
VeeTol	Vertical Takeoff and Landing aircraft.
Very	As in "It's Very....." or "It could be Very....". A hip term for cool, fun or "in". See Wavy.
Vat Job	A person so highly modified that the process was not possible with conventional surgical methods. Rather, the person(or meat) was disassembled and reassembled biologically, usually in a nutrient bath or vat. See Meat Bop, Doll.
Wavy	A term for cool or smooth, as in "Everything is running according to plan, it's Wavy".
Wigly	A term for weird or different, an unusual feeling. Usually used in reference to a good drug trip. "It feels all Wigly...".
Wetware	Any enhancement (usually mental) that is purely biological in nature.
Wire Boy/Girl	Another name for a Net Runner.
The word	A term for any type of Hip Slang.

And so Net nerds and Booster kids, now you got the Know, now you are truly STATE OF THE ART, so happy gaming. If in the course of your Cyberpunk campaign you come up with any Cyberslang that you think is truly Wavy, send it in to NCRP and maybe it too will appear in such an article as this.

SOURCES:

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Doctor X:

The Man With the Cure

By Anthony Herring

Introduction

Let's face it, at some point in his dangerous career, a shadowrunner's lucky star is going to be eclipsed by the flash of a gun. If he's not geeked, he can look forward to a long stay in a medical facility. With competent treatment, he may once again slip into the shadows. But where, exactly, does a runner go to find aid? Somewhere that doesn't ask a lot of questions about suspicious wounds or file public reports concerning cyberware augmentations — he goes to the Aurora Clinic.

The following information concerns the Aurora Clinic. The possibilities for scenarios involving Doctor X and his clinic are numerous. Suggested adventures are described at the end. Doctor X and his staff can be introduced as Contacts for the player characters.

Maps of the Aurora Clinic

Doctor X has leased an old, brick building, located on the corner of Aurora Ave (HWY 99) and Denny Way in downtown Seattle. The structure contains a basement, ground floor and first floor. All windows have been bricked up.

All Maglock Keypads in the building are Target Number 6, unless otherwise noted.

First Floor:

1) *Elevator.* Buttons in the elevator allow access to the ground and first floors. A Maglock Keypad (Target Number 8) restricts entry into the basement.
2) *Nurses' Station.* A low wall surrounds this area, allowing the two nurses stationed here an unobstructed view of the recovery ward. In the event of a disturbance, a PANICBUTTON beneath each desk may be used to summon the orderlies.
3) *Recovery Ward.* Rows of cots fill this area. Patients who cannot afford private rooms are allowed to rest here under the close scrutiny of the nurses.

   Cost: 250 nuyen a day for Basic Care, 500 nuyen a day for Intensive Care.

4-13) *Private Rooms.* Each room has a bed, chair and small lavatory.

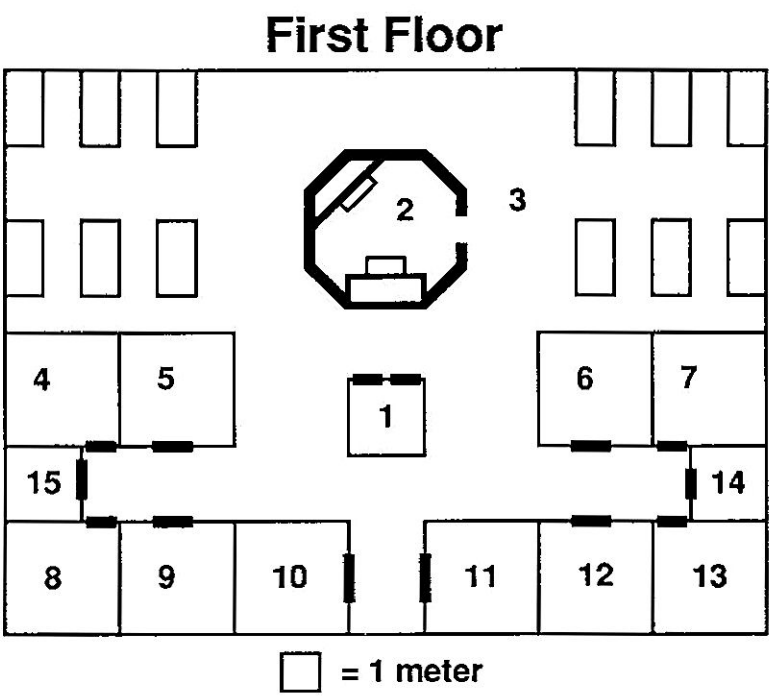
   Cost: 500 nuyen a day for Basic Care, 1000 nuyen a day for Intensive Care.

14) *Stairs.* The stairs grant access to the roof, first floor and ground floor. Entry to the basement is blocked by a brick wall (Barrier Rating 15).
15) *Storeroom.* Shelves are jammed with janitorial supplies (i.e. cleaning agents, mops, buckets, etc). The custodian, Ebaneezar, has cleared a space for a small cot where he lounges while off duty. A pin-up of Fiona Lust, a gamous simsense star, hangs on the back wall.

Ground Floor:

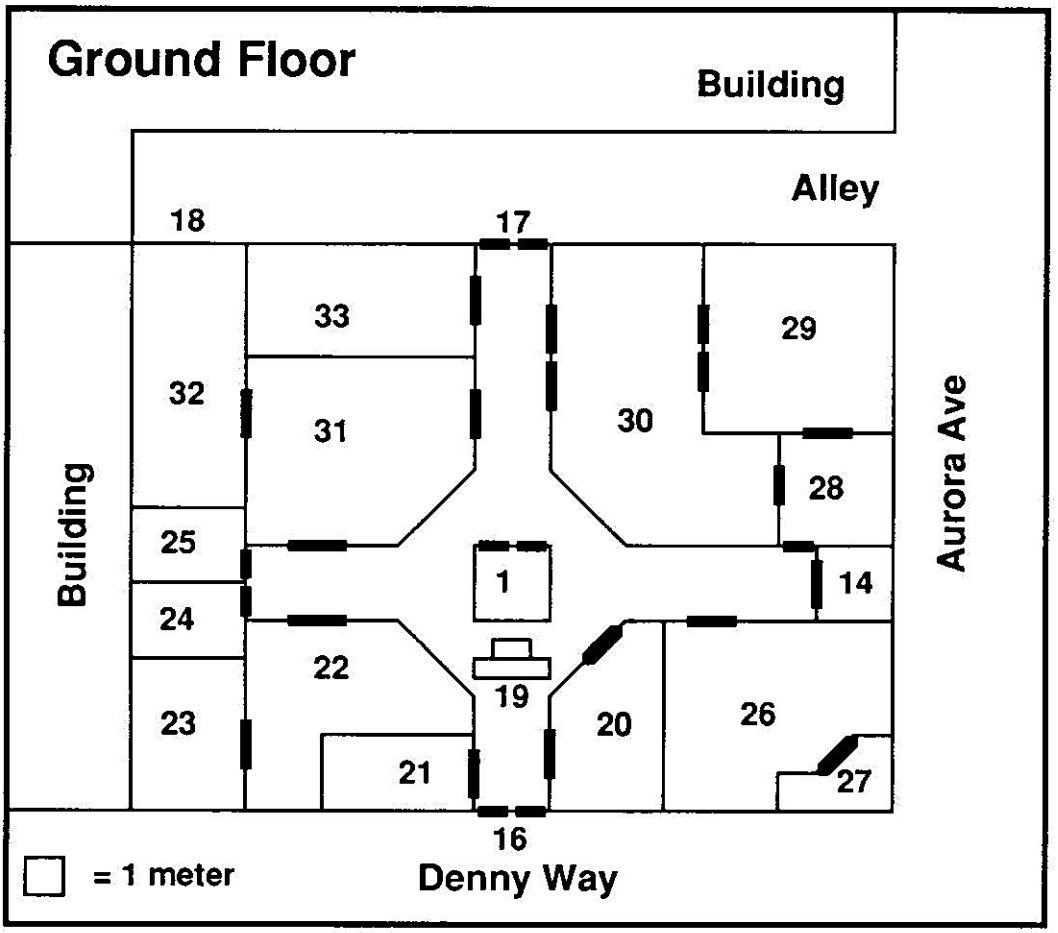
16) *Main Entrance.* Metal doors block the entrance (Barrier Rating 10), locked with Maglock Keypads. A security camera monitors the doorway. The traditional symbol of physicians, two entwined serpents, is painted on the sturdy portals along with "Aurora Clinic" in bright red capitals. Various graffiti also adorn the walls and doors.
17) *Alley Entrance.* The back entrance appears exactly like the front. It opens onto the alley where the clinic's single emergency vehicle is parked. Much of the alley is filled with refuse, the home of various types of street scum.
18) *Corpse Chute.* A small (w1 meter x 1 meter) portal covers a steep shaft descending into the basement. The metal door (Barrier Rating 8) is secured with a Maglock Keypad. The gruesome experiments of Doctor X often require humanoid body parts. He hires street scum to acquire what he needs which is passed through the corpse chute in neat little bundles. Air rising from the shaft reeks of rotting flesh and formaldehyde.

   It is possible for an intruder to slide down the chute. However, climbing back out requires a successful Strength roll (Target Number 6).
19) *Front Desk.* The clinic's secretary, Louise, sits behind a massive desk. The desk supports a telecom unit al-



lowing her to see and speak with individuals at the front and back doors. She can open the doors remotely. A PANICBUTTON under the desk summons the orderlies.

20) *Orderlies' Lounge.* While not on duty, the orderlies are found playing cards, eating or sleeping. A round table with four chairs sits in the middle of the room and four cots line the walls. Two battered vending machines stand against one wall advertising an assortment of stuffers in flashing neon.
21) *Waiting Room.* This sparse room is furnished with six uncomfortable chairs and two gurgling vending machines.
22) *Nurses' Lounge.* Here the nurses come to relax and eat while on break. The sweet smell of cherry flavored cigarettes lingers in the air.
23) *Head Nurse's Office.* Hilda's office contains a desk, two chairs and a sofa. The room is cluttered with Juicy-meat-Treat wrappers, the stuffer she compusively stuffs. There is a PANICBUTTON under her desk.
24) *Ladies Lavatory.*
25) *Men's Lavatory.*
26) *Doctor X's Office.* Like all doors in the clinic, the office door is made of metal (Barrier Rating 10). However, it is also protected by a Maglock Keypad. Inside there is a huge desk, three chairs and a sofa. A personal computer sits on the desk and allows limited access to the clinic's mainframe. In the shadows is a human skeleton hanging from a wooden stand. Being something of an eccentric, the doctor collects old medical texts which are jammed into a bookshelf against the wall. In the desk are found data cartridges containing information on the clinic's former patients, a fully loaded Colt America L36, and various mundane office supplies. No information concerning the doctor's secret experiments are kept in this office. There is a PANICBUTTON under his desk.
27) *Private Lavatory.* The doctor likes his privacy.
28) *Scrub Room.* Sinks and antiseptic dispensers line the walls along with surgical masks, gowns and gloves.
29) *Operating Room.* This sterile room contains two tables and four movable carts holding an assortment of surgical implements. Lights, drilles, grinders and suction hoses dangle from the ceiling.
30) *Emergency Room.* Patients in dire need of medical attention are brought here first. Much of the same type of equipment as in the operating room is found here.
31) *Meeting Room.* A huge, round table dominates the chamber. Twelve comfortable chairs are positioned around it. The table supports a data display system. This room is also used as a counseling chamber for customers considering elective surgery. Display cases containing cybernetic limbs and organs stand about the room.
32) *Computer Center.* The door to this room is secured with a Maglock Keypad. Several large computer banks line the walls. Mavis, a decker, is always in the computer center.
33) *Residents' Quarters.* Doctor X has two student physicians on twenty-four hour call. Their room is protected by a Maglock Keypad (Target Number 4), and contains two beds, two desks, four chairs and two personal computers. One of the doctors is obviously a slob, for his desk and bed are a shambles.



Basement:

34) *False Basement.* The elevator doors open upon a small basement. The place is packed with an assortment of junk collected over dozens (perhaps hundreds) of years. A path through the garbage leads to the door of area 35.
35) *Storage Room.* The heavy door into this room is secured by a Maglock Kepad. Inside are shelves holding a variety of medical supplies, including medikits, slap patches, drugs and a spare stabilization unit (Rating 6). There is enough medication (both legal and illegal) in here to stock a small pharmacy, bringing the total value of the storage room contents to 500,000 nuyen.

Intruders are lead to believe the storage room is the only place of interest in the basement. However, there is much more. Behind a huge, defunct boiler is a hidden door (Intelligence roll, Target Number 4, to spot it) with a Barrier Rating of 10. The Maglock

Keypad (Target Number 8) controlling the door is located in an old, dented fusebox hanging nearby (Intelligence roll, Target Number 5, to find it). The door opens onto area 36, Doctor X's chamber of horrors.

36) *Secret Basement.* This area serves as both a BioTech and a CyberTech Laboratory. Four chemsuits hang on pegs near the entrance. Over 20,000 nuyen worth of parts and gear lay scattered upon metal shelves. Many of the work benches are covered with glassware, containing bubbling liquids and churning gases. Tissues and organs grow in six gurgling vats along the west wall. Within glass jars, humanoid body parts float in multicolored fluid.

Near area 18, three male and two female corpses dangle from chains fixed to the ceiling, while four large, plastic-wrapped additions to Doctor X's gruesome menagerie.

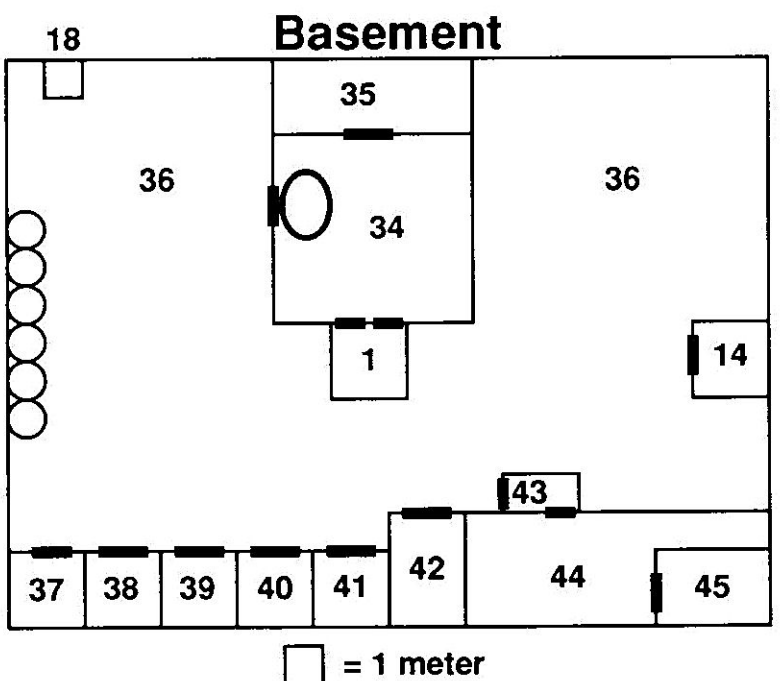
37-41) *Padded Cells.* The doctor's living, experimental subjects are kept in straitjackets in these padded rooms. The metal doors are secured with Maglock Keypads (Target Number 4). Security cameras allow around-the-clock surveillance of the "patients". The descriptions of any current occupants are left up to the gamemaster.

42) *Basement Office.* Although the doctor has a larger office upstairs, he is most often found down here. The room contains a desk and three chairs. On the desk is a personal computer, granting access to the clinic's mainframe. Numbered data cartridges fill the drawers. They hold little information concerning the doctor's hideous experiments. Most of the data is stored (and protected) within the mainframe. The desk supports a telecom system, allowing Dr. X to communicate with his secretary. A fully loaded Uzi III rests in one of the drawers. Eight monitors line the west wall, and are connected to the security cameras in the padded cells, the biohazardous experiment chamber, and the entrances of the building.

43) *Airlock.* The walls of the airlock and biohazardous lab are glass (Barrier Rating 2). The decontamination chamber is protected by a Maglock Keypad (Target Number 5), and is monitored by biosensors. Should there be a dangerous leak, the sensors alert the computer to seal off the basement by blocking the elevator shaft, corpse chute and ventilation system with sheets of plasteel (Barrier Rating 10).

44) *Biohazardous Lab.* Deadly materials are stored here. The sterile room contains a variety of biochemical and biological analysis equipment (worth over 10,000 nuyen). The lab is monitored by biosensors.

45) *Biohazardous Experiment Chamber.* Humanoids subjected to virulent diseases and toxins are secured behind the glass walls of this room. A camera observes the progress of such "experiments". The details of any current occupants are left the the gamemaster.



The Staff At The Aurora Clinic

Bartholomew Grotz, a.k.a. DOCTOR X

Born to a wealthy family, Bartholomew has lead a pampered existence. His father made a fortune as a crime boss, until he and his wife were eliminated by a rival gang. Forlorn and orphaned, Doctor X buried himself in his studies. He inherited the ill-gotten wealth, and has invested the majority of it in the Aurora Clinic. He has not completely severed his ties to the underworld, and can call upon several gangs for favors. He also has connections with several high-level city officials, whom he bribes to make sure the hospital passes city inspections.

Bartholomew's growing enthusiasm for experiments involving human mutations and reanimation have given him the reputation of being a "mad scientist". He jealously guards his secrets, confiding only in Dr. Gestalt, Dr. Yates and Nurse Hilda.

Appearance: Tall and gaunt, Doctor X is a ghoulish figure who wears his long, stringy hair in a single braid. His piercing black eyes are shadowed by thick eyebrows. His beard is kept trimmed, and covers only his upper lip and chin.

Manner/Attitude: Bartholomew is not as crazed as rumors suggest. However, he does derive a certain pleasure from his gruesome activities. He is always serious and very polite.

Loyalties: The doctor places himself and his work above all things. Nevertheless, he is a man of his word, which he gives only rarely.

Attributes:
Body: 2
Quickness: 3
Strength: 3
Charisma: 2
Intelligence: 6
Willpower: 5
Essence: 5.8
Reaction: 4

Dice Pools:
Dodge: 3
Defense (Armed) : 2
Defense (Unarmed) : 2

Skills: Armed Combat: 2, Etiquette (Corporate) : 3, Etiquette (Street) : 4, Biological Sciences : 8, Biotech: 10, Computer: 6, Cybertechnology: 8, Electronics: 4, Negotiation: 3, Physical Sciences: 6, Psychology: 6, Unarmed Combat: 2

Cyberware: Datajack

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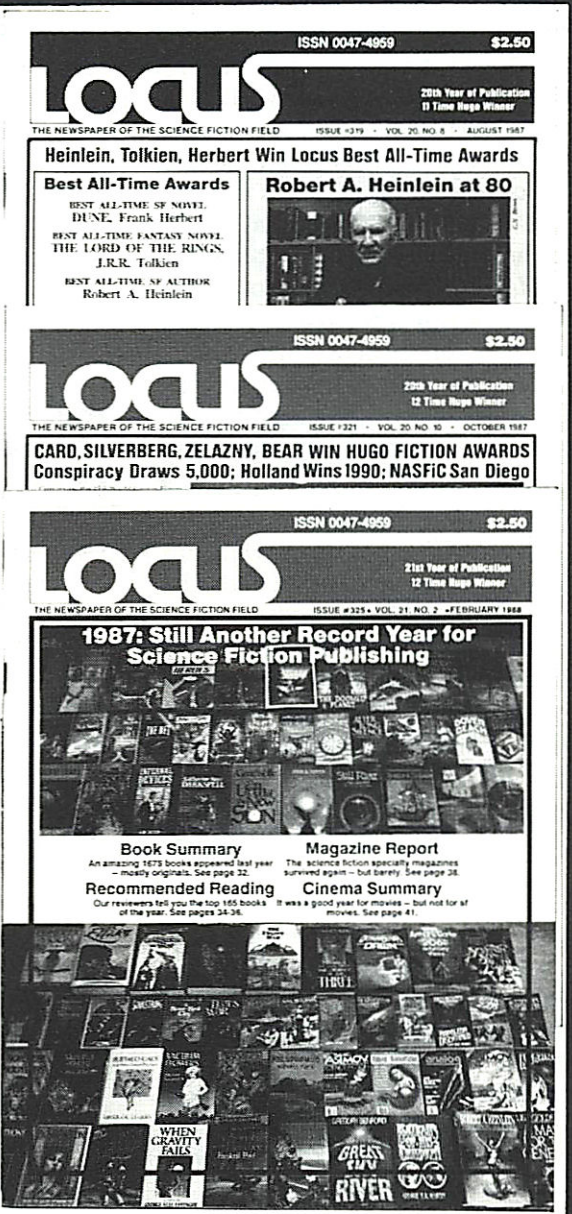
Marion Zimmer Bradley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Gear: Colt America L36 (shoulder holster, no reloads), Lined Lab Coat, Medkit, Wristphone

Dr. Harry Gestalt

Dr. Gestalt is a resident physician at the clinic. He is privy to Doctor X's experiments, much to his dislike. A growing sense of guilt has lead him to the brink of reporting the doctor's hideous activities to the authorities. His mental state has begun to crumble, revealed by sudden bursts of anger. He seldom bathes anymore, and his clothes are wrinkled and filthy. His relationship with Louise has become strained.

Appearance: Harry is tall and thin. His thick mane of black hair is always a tangled mess. He has stopped shaving, and is beginning to sprout a coarse beard.

Manner/Attitude: Because of extreme guilt, Dr. Gestalt is prone to fits of rage, followed by periods of deep depression.

Loyalties: When he was accepted onto the staff, Harry was unquestionably loyal to Dr. X. However, his faithfulness has been shaken with the knowledge of the doctor's secret experiments.

Attributes:
Body: 2
Quickness: 4
Strength: 3
Charisma: 4
Intelligence: 5
Willpower: 2
Essence: 5.8
Reaction: 4

Dice Pools:
Dodge: 4
Defense (A): 2
Defense (U): 2

Skills: Armed Combat: 2, Biological Sciences: 6, Biotech: 8, Computer: 4, Etiquette (Street): 3, Firearms: 3, Negotiations: 3, Unarmed Combat: 2

Cyberware: Datajack

Gear: Beretta Model 101T (ankle holster, no reloads), Medikit, Wristphone

Dr. Cleveland Yates

Dr. Yates is the other resident on staff. He is fully aware of Bartholomew's experiments and enjoys helping him perform them. He has notice changes in his roommate, Dr. Gestalt, and has become worried about his state of mind.

Appearance: Cleveland is short and plump. His clothing is always oversized, but well kept. His blond hair is buzzed short.

Manner/Attitude: Dr. Yates is all business, taking his work very seriously.

Loyalties: The young physician is totally loyal to Doctor X.

Attributes:
Body: 2
Quickness: 2
Strength: 3
Charisma: 2
Intelligence: 5
Willpower: 2
Essence: 5.8
Reaction: 5

Dice Pools:
Dodge: 2
Defense (A): 1
Defense (U): 1

Skills: Biological Sciences: 6, Biotech: 7, Computer: 4, Cybertechnology: 6, Electronics: 3, Etiquette (Street): 2, Negotiation: 4

Cyberware: Datajack

Gear: Medkit, Wristphone

Hilda Gruff, Head Nurse

Hilda goblinized into an ork when she was ten years old. She joined the staff when she was only twenty, and has become a valuable member.

Appearance: Nurse Gruff is tall and obese. She possesses considerable body hair, covering portions of her face, chest and shoulders. She wears her hair in a tall beehive, with a small nurses' cap wobbling at the top.

Manner/Attitude: She hates who she is, and enjoys taking her vengence out on Breeders (normal humans). The Head Nurse is something of a sadist.

Loyalties: Hilda is totally loyal to Doctor X, whom she admires for his apparent cruelty.

Attributes:
Body: 6
Quickness: 2
Strength: 6
Charisma: 1
Intelligence: 4
Willpower: 3
Essence: 6
Reaction: 3

Dice Pools:
Dodge: 2
Defense (A): 5
Defense (U): 2

Skills: Armed Combat: 5, Biotech: 3, Etiquette (Street): 3, Firearms: 3, Interrogation: 2, Unarmed Combat: 2

Cyberware: None

Gear: Medkit, Stun Baton, Walther Palm Pistol (lab coat pocket, no reloads)

Louise, Secretary

Louise is twenty-five years old. She has been employed at the clinic for three years. She knows nothing about Doctor X's experiments. The secretary is romantically involved with Dr. Gestalt, who has been abusive and paranoid of late.

Appearance: Louise is a real knockout. Her ruby hair swirls to a spike, and her black makeup is applied with perfection.

Manner/Attitude: She is always cheerful, if somewhat vapor-headed.

Loyalties: Her first loyalty is to herself, then Dr. Gestalt, and finally Doctor X.

Attributes:
Body: 2
Quickness: 2
Strength: 1
Charisma: 5
Intelligence: 3
Willpower: 2
Essence: 4.8
Reaction: 2

Dice Pools:
Dodge: 2
Defense (A): 1
Defense (U): 1

Skills: Computer: 3, Etiquette (Corporate): 4

Cyberware: Datajack, 100 Mp of Memory

Gear: Leather Dress (synthetic), Simsense Player Unit, 3 Simsense Entertainment Chips

Mavis, Decker

Mavis is thirty-three years old, and has been with the Aurora Clinic for five years. She is a trusted employee.

Appearance: Although her face and body appear haggard, her brilliant green eyes reveal the beauty within.

Manner/Attitude: She has the curiosity of a small child, and cannot resist peeping into Doctor X's secret files. The knowledge she has uncovered has not surprised her.

Loyalties: Mavis is most concerned with herself and her job. She finds the doctor's experiments objectionable, but does not want to risk losing a steady paycheck.

Attributes:
Body: 2
Quicknes: 3
Strength: 1
Charisma: 1
Intelligence: 4
Willpower: 3
Essence: 5.5

Reaction: 3

Dice Pools:

Dodge: 3

Defense (A): 1

Defense (U): 1

Skills: Computer: 6, Computer Theory: 6, Computer (B/R): 6, Electronics: 6, Etiquette (Street): 4, Firearms: 3, Physical Sciences: 4

Cyberware: Datajack, Headware Memory (30 Mp)

Gear: Ares Predator (shoulder holster, no reloads), Fuchi Cyber-4 with Response Increase: 2

Programs: Bod: 6, Evasion: 6, Masking: 6, Sensors: 6, Attack: 6, Browse: 4, Deception: 4

Ebaneezar, Janitor

Ebaneezar is a gnarly Ork. However, he is a trusted employee. In addition to his janitorial duties, Ebaneezar is often employed by Doctor X as a message bearer, street scrounger and grave robber.

Appearance: His large, muscular frame is hunched over. Long, oily strands of black hair are twined about bits of bone and glass. He is forty-five years old.

Manner/Attitude: Ebaneezar doesn't bother anyone who doesn't bother him. Blending into the shadows, he tries to stay out of the way. If provoked, he becomes insanely violent, fighting until dead or incapacitated.

Loyalties: He worships Doctor X, and would willingly die for him.

Attributes:

Body: 7

Quickness: 3

Strength: 8

Charisma: 1

Intelligence: 2

Willpower: 2

Essence: 6

Reaction: 2

Dice Pools:

Dodge: 3

Defense (A): 5

Defense (U): 4

Skills: Armed Combat:5, Etiquette (Street): 4, Stealth: 4, Unarmed Combat: 4

Cyberware: None.

Gear: Knife (ankle sheath), Sap (in pocket).

Average Nurses (94 per eight-hour shift)

Appearance: All are normal human females, averaging from age twenty to fifty. They wear blood-red gowns, hose, shoes, and caps.

Manner/Attitude: Although they seem callous, most of the nurses really care for their patients' well-being.

Loyalties: They place themselves before their jobs and their boss.

Attributes:

Body: 2

Quickness: 2

Strength: 2

Charisma: 3

Intelligence: 4

Willpower: 2

Essence: 6

Reaction: 3

Dice Pools:

Dodge: 2

Defense (A): 1

Defense (U): 1

Skills: Biotech: 3

Cyberware: None.

Gear: Medikit, Stun Baton.

Average Orderlies (6 per eight-hour shift)

Appearance: All of the orderlies are Trolls. They wear bright red jumpsuits.

Manner/Attitude: Generally bad.

Loyalties: They place themselves before their jobs and their employers.

Attributes:

Body: 9

Quickness: 3

Strength: 8

Charisma: 1

Intelligence: 1

Willpower: 2

Essence: 6

Reaction: 2

Dice Pools:

Dodge: 3

Defense (A): 5

Defense (U): 3

Skills: Armed Combat: 5, Etiquette (Street): 3, Firearms: 5, Unarmed Combat: 3

Cyberware: None.

Gear: Ares Predator (shoulder holster, 2 extra clips), Stun Baton.

Other Information

1. *DocWagon Service.*

The Aurora Clinic contracts its own DocWagon Service. The terms of the agreement are similar to those described on page 129 of *Shadowrun*. However, the clinic has only one ground vehicle and no aircraft. A typical response team consists of either Dr. Gestalt or Dr. Yale, two nurses and two orderlies.

2. *Cyberware.*

Doctor X has the facilities to install all types of cyberware. Biz with the doc is strictly confidential. Prices are as per those in *Shadowrun*. However, he is often willing to trade cyberware for services rendered.

3. *Biotech.*

The Aurora Clinic sells a wide variety of biotech equipment, from slap patches to stabilization units. Vat-grown replacement tissues and organs are also available. Prices are standard.

4. *Elective Surgery.*

Doctor X and his staff can perform all types of elective surgery. Prices are standard.

Scenarios Involving The Aurora Clinic

1. *"Madness Rules the Kingdome!"*

During a laser show at the Kingdome, a green gas was introduced into the ventilation system. The hallucinogenic substance caused the crowd the stampede from the arena, resulting in numerous death. Unknown to the authorities, this dastardly deed was the work of Doctor X, who was performing a "live" experiment. The shadowrunners have been secretly hired by agents of the government to identify, locate and exterminate the culprit. Can they successfully infiltrate the Aurora Clinic? Or will they end up as patients? Were they at the laser show?

2. *"The Madman Must be Stopped!"*

Rumors of sadistic experiments have spread to the ears of concerned city officials. A crack team of shadowrunners must be hired to find the truth. Can they navigate the Aurora Clinic's Computer System? Will they become lab rats themselves? What exactly are these grotesque experiments?

3. *"Where's Our Chummer?"*

During the last run, one of the team was injured. He was admitted to the Auroroa Clinic with Serious wounds. His chummers are told he died during the night. How can this be? He wasn't hurt that bad. Can they resolve the mystery before their chummer is driven mad by the insane experiments of Doctor X? Will Dr. Gestalt help them? ■

How to be a Holo-Jock and Not Get Your Butt Shot Off

Universal HoloJock Emblem

By Michael Bay

Holo-Jock Extraordinaire

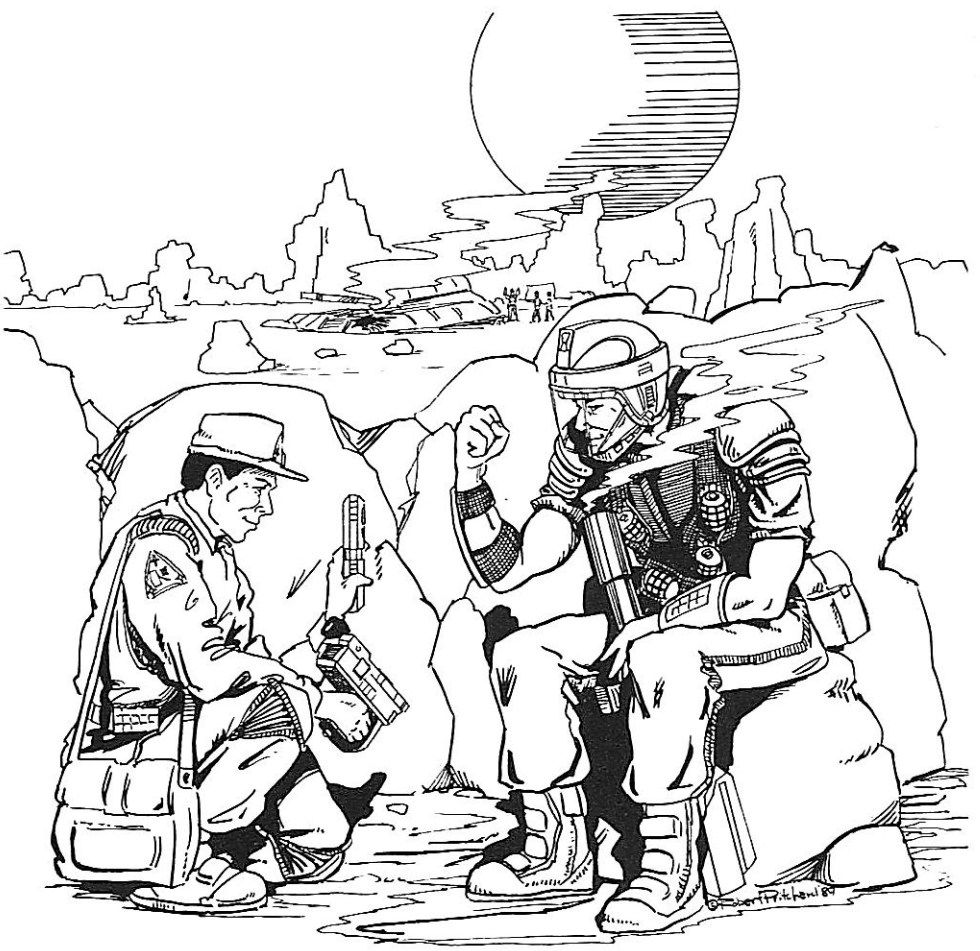
Prelude

The Vargr Admiral steps out from the hatch of his cutter into the bright sunlight, all grey-brown fur and red and silver uniform, swaggering forward, tail twitching, a twisted snarl that must be a smile on that canine face. The crowd surrounding me gasps and murmurs as the arrogant commander begins to descend into the crowded plaza. I quickly switched on, hit the zoom and checked the shotgun microphone. Good pictures and good sound. My what big teeth you have. Even the TNS will buy this stuff; a Vargr raider gloating over his victory, surveying his conquest, delivering his list of demands for the world authorities. Jessail Yraphet made a quarter of a meg with the holovid of the raids at Sotri, but the tingle in my spine tells me this could be something better. And more lucrative. I doublecheck the tracking, the sound, the picture; so far so good.

The Admiral reaches the bottom of the landing stairs and I lose sight of him. I try to get a shot by holding the camera high above my head, flipping the optical receiver down over my right eye. No good, too many people in front. I begin to push my way forward through the crowd. The crowd is growing restless, beginning to push forward to where the delegation of the world government is seated. I can hear the distinct growling of the Admiral's bodyguard, and twist my left arm around to try to get a shot of the guards. There, over near the fountain. Same red and silver uniforms. Plasma guns. Big ones. The people begin moving toward the guards, surging forward toward the empty center of the square. The crowd around me is moving too, and me with them. Where is Admiral Wolf?

Suddenly there is chaos. Shouts, screams, furious human rage, snarls, growls, barks. Explosions, the skull shattering noise of the plasma rifles, the chatter of an autorifle somewhere behind me. Wham, I'm knocked to the ground from behind, a shower of dirt and shards of masonry falling with me. I clutch the camera and roll, hoping to shield it with my body. People are running everywhere. I scramble to my feet, shaken, but unhurt. A blur of black, as four men dash past me. I throw the camera up, following on instinct. Uniforms! Black? Imperials? I can't tell, running, trying desperately not to lose them in the crowd. The autorifle is still firing, heard distinctly over the screams filling the square, but no more screaming plasma rifles.

Now I'm through the crowd, in the center of the square. Adrenaline surges through my body as I quickly do a 360, surveying the scenes being played out in a sort of slow motion around me. Panicked humans fleeing wildly from the gunfire behind them and the carnage in front of them; a group of braver souls, humans, savagely beating a Vargr bodyguard; the government delegation splattered about their table, nothing more than blood and tissue; a clump of burning bodies; and there, racing up the landing stairs, four men in black uniforms, brandishing pistols. I pan up to follow their progress; this holodisk will be worth a half million credits. If I can get it to an Ops Man.



Introduction

Scenes like the one above are commonplace now that the Rebellion has split our Imperium, even if the situation is unique. The chaos and death, the horrors and atrocities of modern warfare are being seen by sophonts all across the galaxy, thanks to the courage of millions of holojocks who fear nothing and always want a commission twice their due. You see them at work everyday, carrying holocams on their shoulders, optical receiver flipped up, media badges hanging from every pocket, and these days, a sturdy firearm holstered at their sides. They live a dangerous existance, risking it all for the big picture, the holovid that will make them the hottest jock in the Imperium. Journalistic objectivity means you know when to duck.*(Objectivity = the tendency of objects to hit people who don't duck)*Journalistic privilege is the right to get executed as a spy. In the Rebellion, the pretentions of the media have come to an abrupt end. Freedom of the Media means nothing to Dulinor's troops when you are wearing a clearance badge issued by Lucan. The adage about two sides to every story doesn't hold anymore. Today, there are eight or nine sides, and with a little editing you can sell to them all. After one the early battles between ground forces of Lucan and Dulinor, Imlur Galaan sold edited copies to both sides, each version indicating that the other side had lost! Of course you can't always sell that stuff to the news services, some of whom cling to the fantasy of neutrality.

Where the News Comes From

Today, anyone can sell news: Navy Cam-Ops, holo-jocks, independent operators, stringers, network affiliates and contractors, System and sector networks, and anyone who has a home holocam or microphone. All it takes is being in the right place at the right time, and of course being switched on. And the money is getting better all the time.

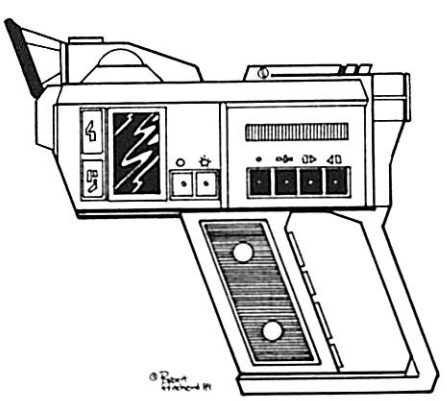
Of course, most of the good stuff is coming from the Indies. The network people are to concerned with saving their hides to hang it out in a laser show. There is no average holo-jock; I quit Naval Intellegence six years ago, picked up a camera and started to operate out here in Lishun. Jessail Yraphet says she was a socialogist (Probably in the Rule of Man. She looks that old.) in Antaries before she started operating. Imlur Galaan is a merchant captain, late of the Dursha Star (which was pickled by Imperial fighters of unknown origin as it was loading cargo. The holovid is fantastic, and may help Galaan replace the D-Star.)

The network people seem to be poured from the same mold, all jack suited in the latest Capital fashion, travelling with six or seven assistants, and given to making load pronouncements about the state of affairs as they see them. In many ways to the resemblance to a noble is more than coincidental. Many are of noble families, second sons of second sons, all dressed up and nowhere to go. Before the Rebellion freed us all, they really were the top of the industry, making huge salaries, travelling at corporate expense, being received as dignitaries anywhere they went. Being a network operator doesn't take any extra skill. It usually takes standing and little grease money to help a Subsector Operations Manager (Ops Men) recognize your worth to the network. Fortunately, it doesn't work that way anymore. The flood of and demand for exciting holovid means that the networks are buying outside their operators. Anyone with the pictures can get on the network feed and get that fat network payoff.

But that takes being in the thick of the action. I've talked with Ops Men who say they're sick of seeing the aftermath of a raid, or bodies lying about a battlefield, or another nuked city. They want see-it-happen pictures, and that takes timing and courage. The Imperium is too big for you to see it all, but the Rebellion means that eventually, you'll see something saleable.

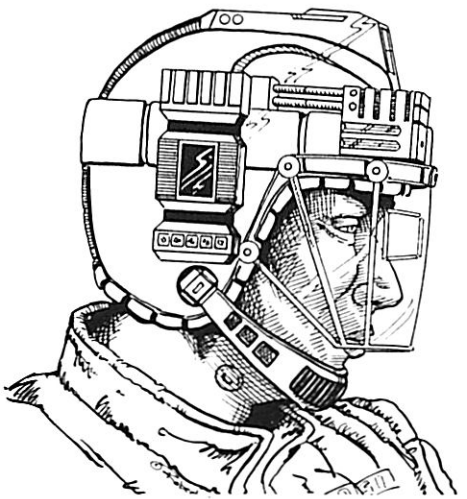
How the News is Distributed

Most of the networks operate with the same structure. In each subsector, there is usually one office, run by the Operations Manager, or Ops Men. The subsector office is used as a base by network operators



Handheld Lightduty Holo Camera

Tech Level 14 Heavyduty Holo-Camcorder for "Hands Off" reporting.
Features: Tri-beam holocamera, multi-function holo recorder, heads up visor display, high intensity lamp, padded shock-proof helment, mount comm interface



and affiliates in the region. All of their holovid is shipped, usually by Express, but sometimes by private courier, to this central office. There the Ops Men sort through it, have the editors polish it up, Voices (readers) add narrative, writers add the information track. Then it's sent on the feed.

The feed is nothing more than a scrambled, encrypted data transmission shot out by the network computer system at that office to the Express Boats. The subsector feed is then carried along the Express boat routes and distributed to the Imperium. When the Express boat enters a system with a subsector network office in it, the network computer accepts the transmission of all of the subsector feeds, which are then decrypted and unscrambled. The Ops Men, using a huge expert system program, sift through the millions of entries to cull the report package they'll distribute to their subscribers in that subsector. It's easier than it sounds with the software their using, and takes about 48 hours before their ready to deliver to the subscribers. And most subscribers receive daily deliveries.

The subscribers, usually planetary broadcast media, then sort through the package themselves before sharing it with the ignorant masses. The package is a rectangle 25 centimeters long, five deep, and ten wide. There are four data channels on the package: Holovid, audio, narrative, and information. The subscribers use what they need; Newspapers will take stills off

the Holovid track and rewrite the information track. Radio often pulls the audio and narrative straight off the package, and Holovid broadcasters make use of all four tracks. The cost of each package depends on the number of stories contained, and is kept secret by the networks and subscribers, but it's commonly accepted that the daily feed costs a quarter of a meg. Big money. Which is why subscriber demand big pictures.

The Ops Men also come up with assignments for their operators and writers, sending them where their inside knowledge or intuition suggests a good story will be. Outside work is screened by the Ops Men, and in the past was usually rejected. But not anymore. Many network operators either ran or quit or died early in the Rebellion. Now anyone can sell to a desperate Ops Man trying to fill his quota for the feed.

How the News Media Manipulates and is Manipulated

Anyone who claims the media isn't biased is either stupid or biased. Impartiality means convincing someone you're not going to slam their side with the holovid you just shot.

In the pre-Rebellion days, the Imperium had some strict regulations about tampering with intersteller transmissions, but unfortunately, no one has times for regulations any more.

Consider this: An Express Boat pops into the Criideu system late 1117 with the official news that the Emperor had been cooked by the Archduke Dulinor and that his nephew Lucan had succeeded Strephon. On that same boat are two different net feeds from Core. The Imperial News Association has this heart wrenching holo of a tearful Lucan stepping out before the crowds who go wild with adulation. Data Service Interstellar has the same video but Lucan isn't crying! He's got this big grin all over his face! Same camera angle! Same location! Different images and different effects. The Data Service subscribers ran the story for about half an hour before their transmissions mysteriously stop.

Consider this: In the war for the hearts and minds of Imperial Citizens, one word, one phrase, one shot of the wrong picture can convince billions. Half the battle, accoring to an old Vilani philosopher, is convincing the enemy he has lost. How true that idea has become today.

The real truth is that no matter how hard they try, every network gets used once in a while. And that has become especially true in these trying times. Rumors have been circulating through the grape vine that Lucan has put a vice clamp on the news nets on Capital, installing his own people as Ops Men.

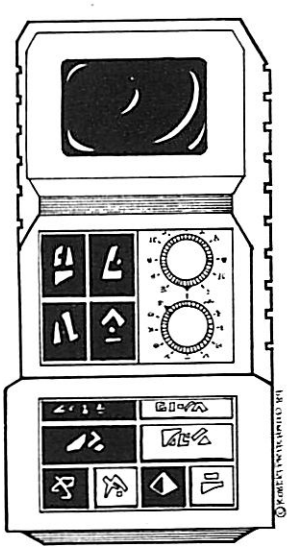
I've also heard tales of hijacked Express Boats, intercepted news transmissions, strategic revisions and omissions, and computer generated holo-vid (was Lucan smiling or weeping?). I'm sure most of the stories are exaggerated or false, but the only news I trust is the *news I shoot myself.*

The Technology of the News Media

The tool of the trade these days is the Holovideo imager. I carry an Ikegami 9130 made by a subsidiary of Delgado Trading.

The Ikie is a shoulder mounted, self-stabilizing recorder powered by super-batteries. It weighs three kilograms. Your left hand holds it up on your shoulder, and the grip has the control studs for operation. The Ikie holds up to six four hour holovid disks in the side mounted magazine, which also features an insty-wipe in case you don't want to get caught with incriminating holovid.

The system incorporates a number of other features, including: Night, thermal, and low spectrum radiation imaging; computerized light filtering; polarized lens; 200 X zoom; a shotgun mike that can pick up directional audio, like a whisper from 500 yards; a wide scan mike; a throat-mike receiver for narration; and a optical and audial headset. The headset has a tiny earphone and a 5 cm square optical receiver that flips up or down over the right eye, allowing the operator to see what the imager is seeing.



Portable Studio Editor/Mixer Built in Player (2D)

Of course, it isn't state of the art. You should see what the network boys in Core are using these days. But who can afford that stuff. The Ikegami 9130, a years-worth of batteries, and a magazine of disks runs about 75,000 cr used. Of course I made that much shooting Baron Veselstauphen's wedding.

The next most important thing an Indie should have is an edit deck. I own two: A Bryson-Kimanika playback deck, and the Naasirka HVE 8256 edit system. The Bryson-Kimanika is an old model. You just slip the disk in and hit play. It's editing functions are limited to audio, adding a narration or music. It's small enough to fit in your pocket.

The HVE 8256 is altogether something more. I found it in the wreckage of a network shuttle last year, and after several thou credits repair work, I have a state of the art editor. The Naasirka allows you to completely edit any of your raw holovid into network ready form. You can cut, fade, dissolve, flip, shade, split, rotate, enlarge, reduce, and squeeze the holovid any way you can imagine. It also has standard audio editing, and text generation so

you can put names and dates on the pictures. The add-on translator module has been a big help dealing with the Vargr.

I also highly recommend the Tephany Armory's Carboni body Pistol. Shooting holo-vid may be your trade, but shooting with the Carboni that Vargr thug may keep you in business.

Notes for Role-Playing Adventures

Obviously, Traveller game masters can use the news media in a variety of ways. The most important use is to kick off an adventure; i.e., the characters here or see something on the news that sparks the entire affair. Another important aspect is using the media as an information source, a place where the characters can turn to find out the latest news from the Rebellion. That role has been played well by the Traveller News Service column in the JTAS and now Challenge.

Characters:

News gathering itself can be the source of many adventures. Akidda Laagiir's adventures have been well chronicled in the Travellers' Digest. Now that the Rebellion is rumbling through the Imperium, news is found where death and destruction happens. Getting the news is a risky and lucrative business.

Characters can be operators, working full-time or part-time like Imlur Galaan, selling their disks to networks for commissions. Or they can be network operators, subsidized and organized. Where ever there is adventure, operators are sure to be.

Selling any holovid requires the use of the Interpersonal skills and should be role-played. Holovid of a meeting of the Subsector Agricultural Council might sell for a few hundred credits. Holovid of a planetary building council meeting won't sell to the nets at all, unless someone goes beserk. The holovid Marko shot of the Vargr Admiral (who managed to escape in the cutter) was sold to the Travellers News Service for 350,000 credits. Remember, the pictures have to make people want to watch. And the nets won't buy it if it's *not spectacular*.

Encyclopedia Entries:

Data Service Interstellar

One of the oldest news networks (q.v.) dating back to the Second Imperium.

The Imperial News Association

An Imperium wide news network (q.v.) founded in 879 by a consortium of sector wide networks.

Networks, News

Any information gathering and distribution organization that represents more than a single star system. Usually, networks cover single sectors although a small number operate throughout the Imperium.

Traveller News Service

The first news network (q.v.) that attempted coverage of the entire Imperium. Founded on Capital by Mark Miller in the early years of the Third Imperium, the TNS has branches in nearly every subsector of the Third Imperium and a few offices outside the Imperial border. Highly regarded as the most complete and neutral source of news and information.

Task Library: Shooting holo-vid is a lot like combat; it's just a matter of pressing the button. Editing requires Artisan, Communications, or Jack-of-all-trades to do anything other than routine. Repairing damaged equipment can be very difficult because of the miniaturization involved.

To repair a damaged imager or editor:

[varies],Electronic,Dex,[varies]

Referee: Difficulty and time increment depend on level of damage.

Repair must be done in a electronics shop; field repair is impossible.

Damage: Difficulty Time Increment

Superficial damage: Routine 5 minutes

Minor damage: Difficult 30 minutes

Major damage: Formidable 4 hours

Destroyed: Impossible 16 hours

Anything less than destroyed will not damage the data on the holodisks.

Combat: It is possible to use one hand to run an Imager and the other to fire a weapon, but the GM should apply one negative DM for doing both and another if the character has the optical receiver down over his right eye. The receiver displays a transparent view of what the Imager is seeing. You can see through it, but it is distracting. Note that while the Imager is not on, the optical receiver remains transparent. ■

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Helicopters for Warhammer 40K

By Daniel A. George

"We're stuck commander."

A shell burst just five meters away reminded them of the gravity of their situation. For seventeen hours, the striker team of the 93rd regiment had been held down in craters on the west side of the capital city of Trinsic, unable to reach their objective.

Notice had reached the Imperial command that a small group of rebels had taken defense laser station S345 on Rycca in the Zebedee system and were holding the local government hostage. The rebels demanded that their religeous leader, Messiah Elrich Geshwaffen, be recognised as a saint. The rebels declared Rycca independent of the Impeium and its laws.

"Wilton, get the seventh squad on the box. Tell 'em to give us some supporting fire."

"Sir, we lost contact with the seventh over five hours ago."

Commander Maynard quickly grabbed the young trooper by the collar, lifting him off the ground. "Get someone on the box now, Wilton. If you can't, you are going to die on this godforsaken planet. Hear me? You are going to die!" A drop of sweat cut through the layers of dust on Wilton's face. "Get someone on the box! We need support."

Another shell burst hit, sending a shower of dirt into the crater. Wilton's shaking hands fiddled with the knobs. "Right away, sir!"

Maynard was told by Commissar Zared that this was going to be a simple routine assault against a couple dozen zealot freaks armed with primitive weapons. The Commissar himself volunteered to come along and oversee the entire mission. At Maynard's feet lay Commissar Zared, worms feeding on what was left of his head. His poor judgement had killed sixty percent of Maynard's troops and he'd been one of the first ones to go when the orc mercenaries ambushed. Maynard thought to himself that he deserved to die.

Bolter fire buzzed overhead. "Commander, I've got the Fifth on the radio. They say that we've taken eighty percent casualties on the east hill." Wilton's face fell blank. "There's..."

"There is what?" Wilton lay there petrified. "What dammit?"

From within the city walls, two more orc battle buggies emerged, their heavy plasma guns sending showers of white hot ooze into the trenches, dissolving everything they hit. Horrid screams of agonizing pain echoed throughout the battlefield. The smell of burning bodies filled the air. Maynard hated orcs.

Panic broke out. Throughout the craters troops began to retreat to the landing pods, trampling over each other in alarm.

"Get back down!" It was too late. A barrage of heavy weapon fire cut through the panicked mob before they could even reach the crest of the crater. Many fell, rolling back down the crater's slope into twisted heaps of quivering flesh. The rest jumped back into cover, landing on top of their fallen comrades. Retreat was impossible.

Maynard swiftly grabbed Wilton's communicator from the private's limp hand. "This is Commander Maynard. Listen up! Nobody do nothin' 'til I say so. Got it? Stay in position. Sergeant Owen, what is your position? Come in Owen. Where's our heavy artillery?"

From the radio came a grazzled voice. "The sarg is dead sir. My name's Morton."

"You should have been here over ten hours ago. What's your position? We need land raiders immediately."

"Our convoy's trapped six kilometers due east of you sir. We can't get past

their barricade. Too much fire."

"What about the Setninnels?"

"Destroyed along with the Marine squads in a minefield."

"I don't care what you have to do, just get here. Cuz if you don't, there isn't going to be any of us left to support. Over..." Maynard put the comunicator into his pack and made his way over the bodies into the dug out trenches which connected the craters. Medics scurried among the mounds of troops, looking for survivors.

Then from the west came a distant ghostly chopping sound, 'Thwoppa. Thwoppa. Thwoppa. Thwoppa.' Maynard peered out into the smoke streaked sky. In the distance were the sillhouettes of the 107th Air Cavalry.

From Maynard's radio came the choppy voice of Lieutenant Jackson Ironbeard. "Good morning boys. How 'bout a good old fashioned orc fry?"

A smile cracked the dirt on Maynard's face. "Roger Lieutenant." The copters set loose a fury of heavy bolter fire along with their payloads of melta bombs. The orc shelling ceased.

Commander Maynard, checking the power clip in his las pistol, "Ok boys, gear up. On the count of ten, we go over the top. 1, 2, 3, 4..."

Throughout the countless worlds of the Imperium, helicopters are still often used by the Imperial Guard. These mechanical relics are still in service because of their relative mechanical simplicity and ease of repair, when good parts and labor are usually hard to come by in the farthest sectors of the galaxy.

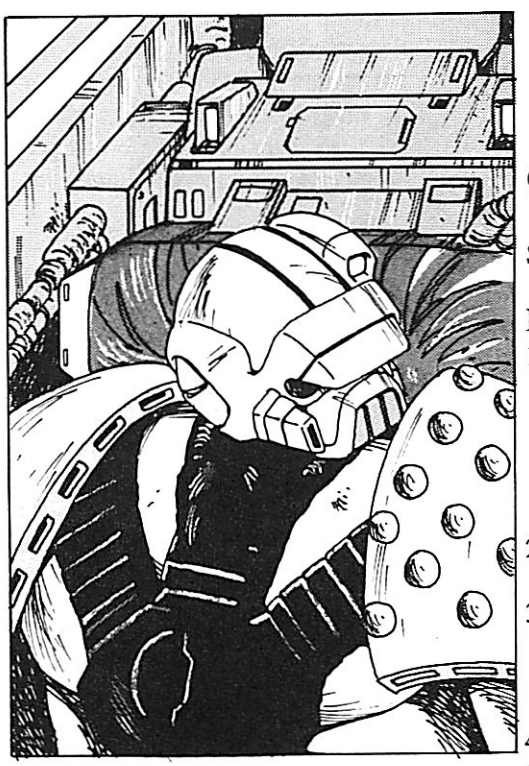
Helicopters give tactical strike support of heavy weapon fire on enemy positions and artillery emplacements, thus allowing ground troops to move in more easily, especially when heavy terrain makes the use of vehicles impossible or impractical. Helicopters can then make frequent low level strafing runs, which have proven to be very effective cover fire. Copters can also be armed with bomb racks and attack at very high altitudes, out of range of enemy fire, proven to be an especially effective technique in the seige of Castle Schwitzgebel by the infamous 123rd Air Calvalry, led by Captain Soltan Kirk.

Copters can also be effectively used to quickly transport troops into battle, either landing them on the ground or dropping them in with gravity chutes. Reinforcements can be brought to the front lines quickly, regardless of the terrain. Often elite forces will be dropped behind enemy lines in an attempt to cut off supplies or to surprise the enemey from behind. In ground landing, helicopters have an advantage over airplanes because they do not require large landing strips. Often, already present clearings can readily be used. The Imperial Air Cavalry Transport division use heavy Anti-plant bombs to clear landing sights in areas of dense vegetation, allowing troops and supplies to be safely dropped.

All normal flyer rules apply to helicopters (pg. 43-46 WH40K) except that at a movement of zero a helicopter may rotate a certain number of degrees, depending on its turn radius (see chart below). In addition, there is a new deviation chart and to-hit chart for bombs and dropped items below.

Zero Movement Turn Chart

Helicopter TRR	Degrees Turned
1/2 or Below	270 degrees
1	180 degrees
2-3	90 degrees
4 or above	45 degrees



Dropped Item Deviation Table

Elevation Level

BS	A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
3	3	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
4	4	3	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
5	5	4	3	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
6	6	5	4	4	3	3	2	1	1	1	1
7	6	5	5	4	3	3	2	2	1	1	1
8	6	6	5	5	4	3	3	3	2	2	1
9	6	6	6	5	5	4	4	3	2	2	1
10	6	6	6	6	5	5	4	4	3	3	1

The item deviates on the number or higher (1d6).

(Note: Targeters increase the BS by one)

The attack hits on a 3 or higher (1d6).

(Note: To-hit modifications are deducted from this roll)

of inches Deviated

Level	Inches
A - 1	1D6"
2 - 3	1D10"
4 - 9	2D6"
10+	2D10"

Hit Location Table

1 - Occupants
2 - Armament
3 - Equipment
4 - Running Gear
5 - Steering/Brakes
6 - Miscellaneous

Occupants, Armament and Equipment:

Same as Vehicle Chart in WH40K

Running Gear: (D6)

1 - *Rotor Link Shatters:* The gears begin to grind themselves apart. Roll D6 every turn. On a 5 - 6, the copter falls to the ground. All occupants must make their save or die! Equipment and Weapons save on a 5 - 6.

2 - *Rotor Damaged:* Max Speed = 1/2. Ac/Dc = 1/2. TRR X2. BS - 1.

3 - *Rotor Destroyed:* The Rotor is blown off! The Helicopter immediately falls to the ground and explodes. Occupants must eject or die!

4 - Same as Vehicle Chart in WH40K

5 - Stabilizer Link Damaged: Roll 1D6 at the beginning of every turn. On a 5 - 6, the helicopter moves out of control for that turn.

6 - *Stabilizer Propeller Destroyed:* The

Helicopter starts to spin out of control. It moves 2D6 inches in a random direction and falls one level a turn until it hits the ground and becomes a ball of twisted metal. During the spin, the occupants may do nothing (except for panicking) and must make a save -3 or die in the crash. All equipment and weapons are destroyed

Steering and Brakes:

1 - 5 same as Vehicle Chart in WH40K
6 - Rotor Hit: Go to Running Gear Table.

Miscellaneous:

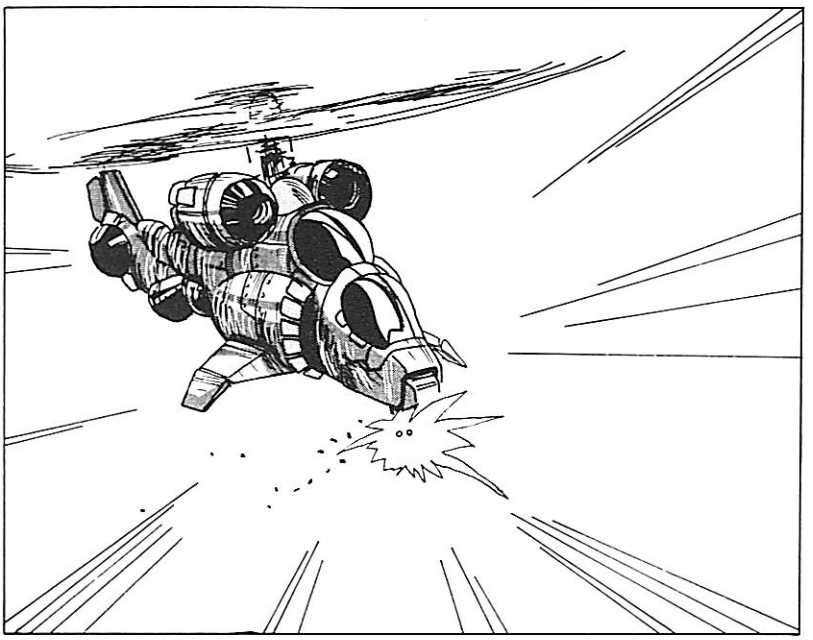
1, 3 - 6 same as Vehicle Chart WH40K.
2 - Control Box Destroyed: The Helicopter travels its full movement forward and then crashes. All occupants must save or die. All equipment and weapons save on a 6.

Out of Control Table:

New Speed = Old Speed + (D10)" - (D10)"
New Direction = (D6) 1 - 2 Right: 3 - 4 Straight: 5 - 6 Left.
New Altitude = (D6) 1 - 2 Down 1 level: 3 - 4 Same Alt: 5 - 6 Up 1 level.

Imperial Striker

The Imperial Striker is the most commonly used assault helicopter used by Imerial forces. It can be mounted with a variety of weaponry and equipment. Though variants of this copter have been used by all branches of the Imperium, it is a favorite of the Imperial Guard. The configurations given are the standard Imperial Army model. Mounted below is a bomb rack which carries a payload of 6 plasma bombs. Mounted in the Nosecone are a set of linked heavy bolters which enable the copter to concentrate fire on a single target. The combination of these weapons and its great speed allow the Imperial Striker to perform low level attacks both with speed and deadly accuracy.



Air Max—300 AcDc-20 Min-0 TRR-1 Cp-2 T-6 D-15 Sv-5 Eq-10 W-8

Equipment — Trageter (2), Bomb Rack, Communicator, Ejection Seats.

Weapons — Plasma Bombs (6), Heavy Bolter (2)

Crew — 2/Gunner and Pilot

Point Value — 335+Crew

Bomb Rack — This allows flying vehicles to carry bombs (Grenades) and drop them from a rack affixed to its body. A rack can carry a maximum of six bombs, though a vehicle can have more than one rack. A vehicle must fly directly over the target in order to use bomb racks effectively and can only drop one bomb per turn. A single rack takes up one equipment point.

Tech Level — 4

Point Cost — 1

McDonnel TH-61a Transcopter

The Mcdonnel TH-61a Transcopter is used to transport supplies, equipment and troops into and out of the battlefield. It is also widely used by medics as a portable hospital. The TH-61a is a favorite of the Imperial Guard because of its durability and weaponry. In a bomb rack on its belly, it carries six heavy Anti-plant bombs with which it clears patches of vegetation in order to land safely. Mounted on its right and left sides are heavy bolters on swivel mounts which allow fire in a 180 degree arc.

Air Max—200 AcDc-15 TRR-2 Cp-12 T-6 D-20 Sv-6 Eq-10 W-6

Equipment — Targeter(2), Auto-Drive, Auto Aim, Communicator, Bomb Rack, Bio-Scanner, Energy Scanner, Rad-Counter, Medi-pack

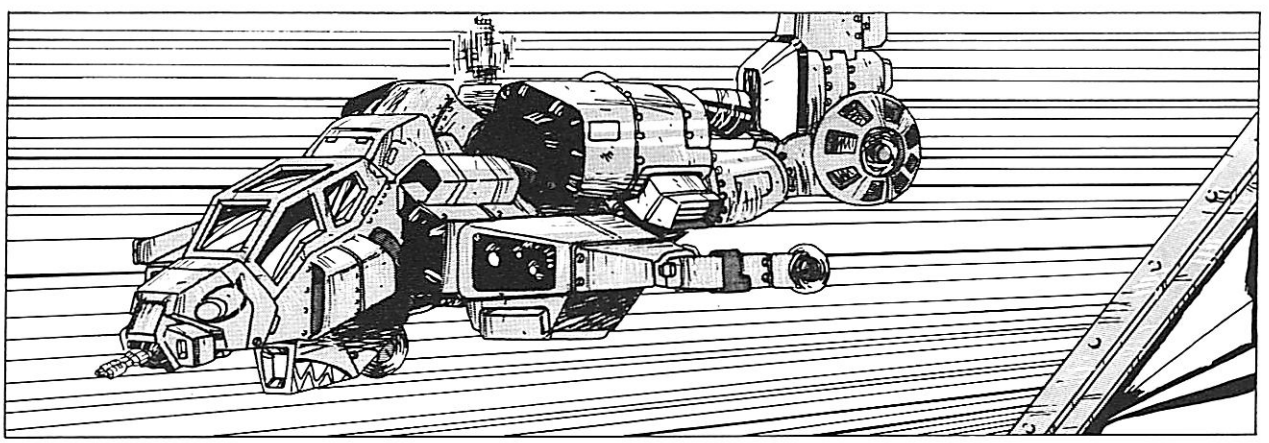
Weapons—Heavy Anti-plant bombs (6), Heavy Bolter (2)

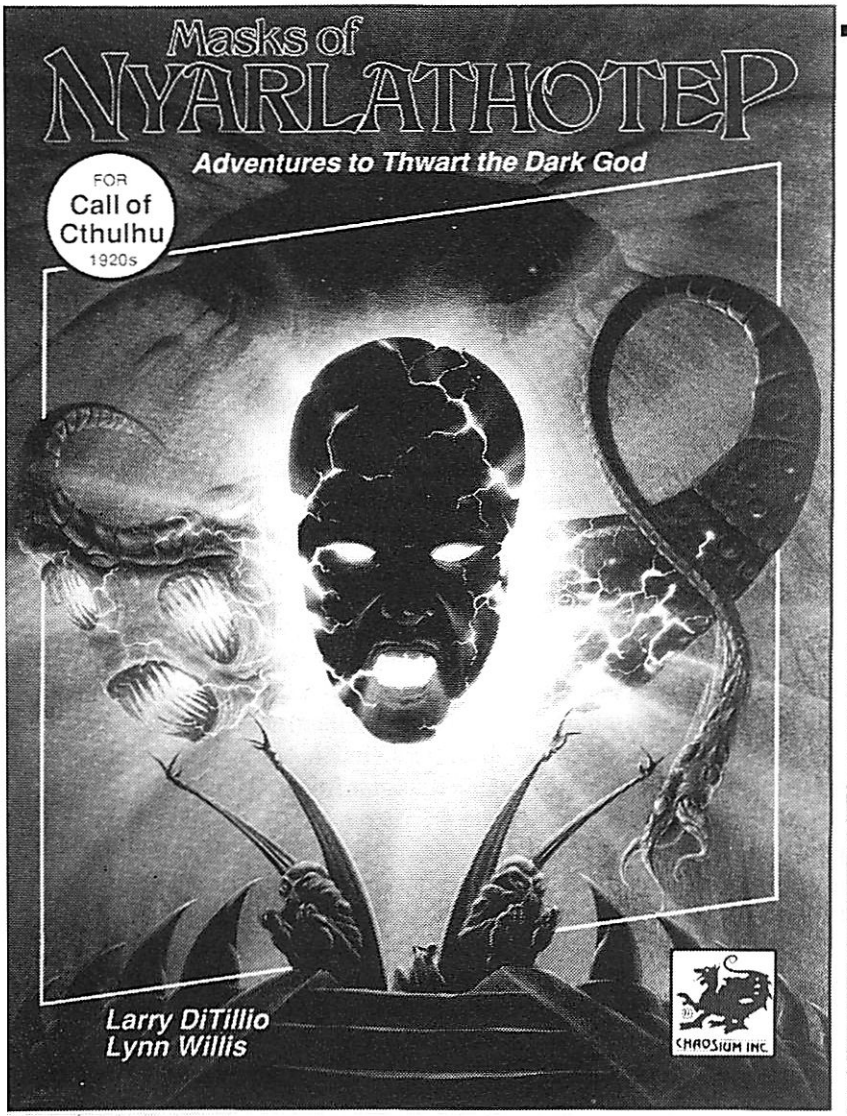
Crew — 2/Pilot and Gunner

Point Value — 326+Crew

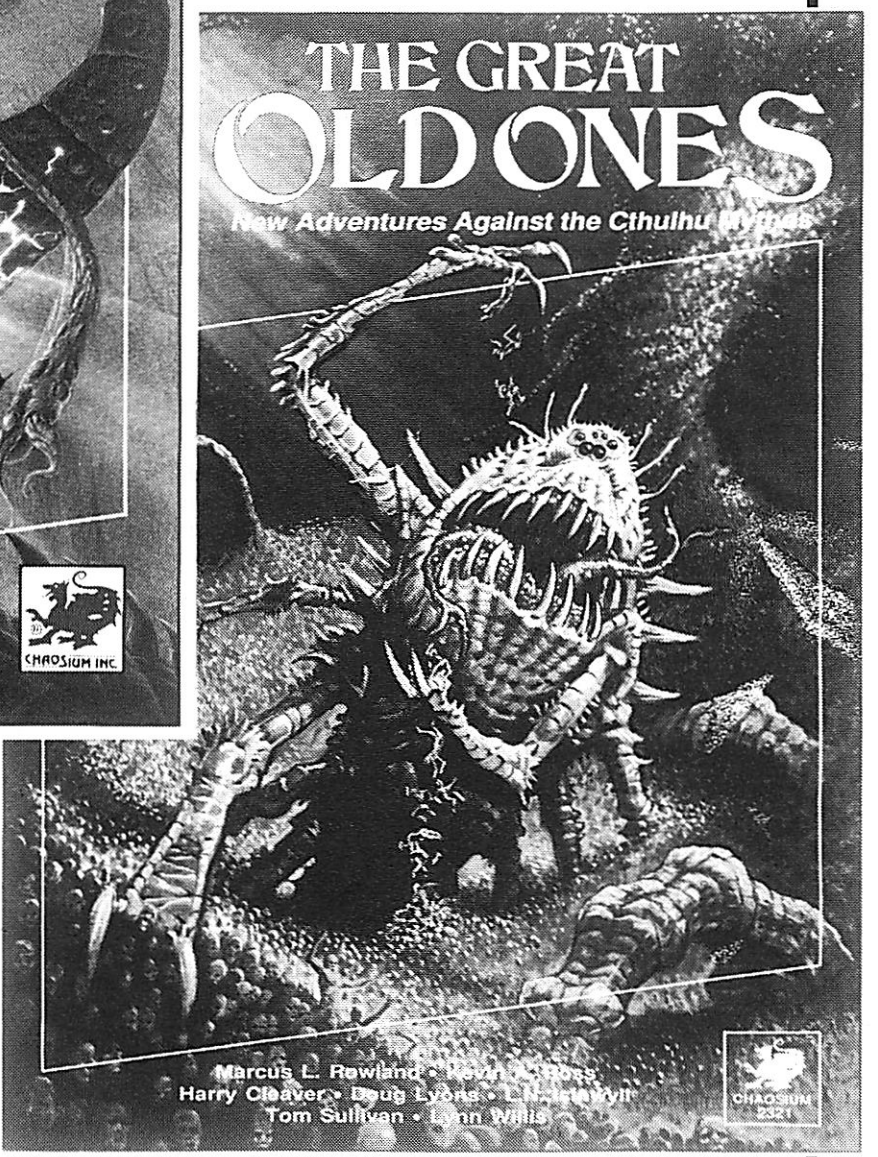
Heavy Anti-plant Bomb - This is a larger version of the Anti-plant grenade and has the same effects, but has a 3" radius.

Point cost — 1/2 (1). ■





The Screams are on us!



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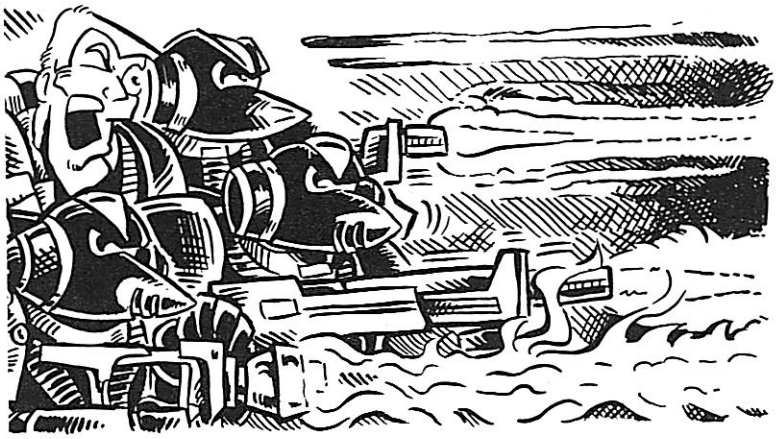


Warhammer 40K to Critter Commandos:

A simple Conversion

By Paul A. Lindberg

In recent months, I have noticed a trend from Games Workshop towards changing the rules in their magazine, whenever a new*White Dwarf*, comes out. These changes are due to any number of factors including new figures, and certain flaws in the rules that they are scrambling to fix. Almost every new book or boxed set produced for the game also seems to affect a change. In addition to this, they have announced a new round of price increases for their popular line of miniatures, the **third** this year.

This pains me to see because, while I enjoy the look and feel of their figures, I personally cannot afford the time and money necessary to continually update my armies each time this occurs.

This, added to the fact that, no matter what they *say*, not all of the "necessary" figures to do this updating with are available in all parts of the country. While this is in part due to distributors cutting back on their selection due to cost, some of the figures simply never make it across the pond.

My investment in WH40K armies, of both time and money, is not insubstantial. I like the figures, but I find myself continually behind and under-gunned in local games. For this I have a solution. Using the new miniatures rules, *Critter Commandoes*, by Crunchy Frog Enterprises, I am providing statistics and basic organizations useable for the WH40K figure line. I have also provided a bare bones universe outline in which to place any combats that occur. This universe allows for marine vs. marine combat without either party having to be chaos or a traitor.

While I honestly don't expect anyone to change over an existing campaign to these rules, they provide an opportunity for players to play out WH40K-style battles in a setting where they have an even chance of winning, and the best chance of having a good time! On with the rules!

The Universe

During the early 21st century, the governments of Earth joined together in search of a way to access space. Their efforts yielded a viable stardrive, based on the old science-fiction concept of a "hyperspace" propulsion system. It caused flights that would take years for a generation ship to be completed in hours. All of the allied governemnts, overjoyed with their successes, continued in their joint efforts in the colonization of space. These effort, however, did not blind them to the possibility of their alliance breaking up. So each sequestered away technology and equipment to be used in case of a break in the alliance. Just such a break did occur, right at the beginning of the 22nd century.

When the U.S. and Soviet Union finally decided to have it out once and for all, the other nations of the Earth had long since moved all important personnel and operations to their major colonies. Earth became a cinder, but the expansion into space was far from over...

Marines: The Marines are the assault forces for the various governments that had sprung forth from Earth. Sheathed in mighty battle armor, they set out with their powerful Blaster Rifles to subjugate new colony worlds and destroy any who opposed them.

Guard: The various National Guards make up the bulk of the troops for the space-going Terrans. They are mainly responsible for policing colony worlds and holding territory already won by the Marines.

Orcs: These aliens were first encountered on a planet called "Citadel," so named due to its high mountains and its nasty atmosphere. They were also in the process of locating colony worlds and any efforts to find peaceful resolutions between

humans and Orcs have been disastrous. Due to an almost universal dislike of these creatures, it is not uncommon to see mortal enemies stop fighting each other to fend off (and slaughter) an attacking Orc force.

Elfkin: These tall, thin, humanoids were encountered a mere 20 years ago. Their pointed ears and pale skin earned them the name Elfkin (sometimes shortened to Elves). Much of their history and society is unknown to Terrans, but of this, be wary. Pay any Elfkin mercenary force well, else they decide that more money can be made from the enemy...

Stubbies: This race of humanoids are actually genetically engineered Terrans. They were first created to work in mines on Earth, but were found to be extremely useful on heavy gravity planets. When the Americal Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) had them declared sentient beings, the bulk of them left to colonize a newly discovered colony world with heavy gravity. Taking over the planet, and many others since, they are now considered to be the staunchest allies to the normal Terrans.

Notes on Play

When playing this variant, the player may want to keep the following things in mind. All of hte vehicles presented in this article are based on vehicles made available for WH40K. Each has its own unique firing arcs. When doing the stats for these vehicles, the assumption was made that these same firing arcs are in effect. A vehicle cannot fire in a direction that it physically cannot aim at.

WH40K uses squads of 10 men. Critter Commandos uses squads of 4-7, but we have fudged it to allow for the 10 men squads. It is also possible (and recommended to buy each squad (of 10) as 2 squads of 5, each with its own officer. This will also allow the option of splitting the force later in combat. It doesn't cost any more to go this route.

None of the races presented here have any "special racial abilities." I felt that none of the potential abilities would have a positive effect on play, if any at all.

I also felt that the use of the more "gonzo" weapons presented in Critter Commandos is actually more fun than just using boring old sci-fi weapons. Marines with cream pies and jet pogo sticks just seems to make the game more fun!

Scenario

The scenario presented here represents a small battle, intended more as an introduction to the rules than as a full fledged major battle.

The situation is this: "On the newly discovered planet, FROGSTAR WORLD B, the United Nations of Venezuela have encountered a nest of Orcs. The Venezuelans have Marines, and the Orcs are expected to be slaughtered. Film at 11."

Marines start on table edge, no more than 6" in from the edge. The Orc player starts with half of his force positioned on the mountain, and the other half still in the caves. Before any movement occurs, the Orc player must notate in which cave his forces are located. No more than 5 troopers can leave a given cave each turn.

The Marine player starts with 2000 points. The Orc player starts with 2500 pts.

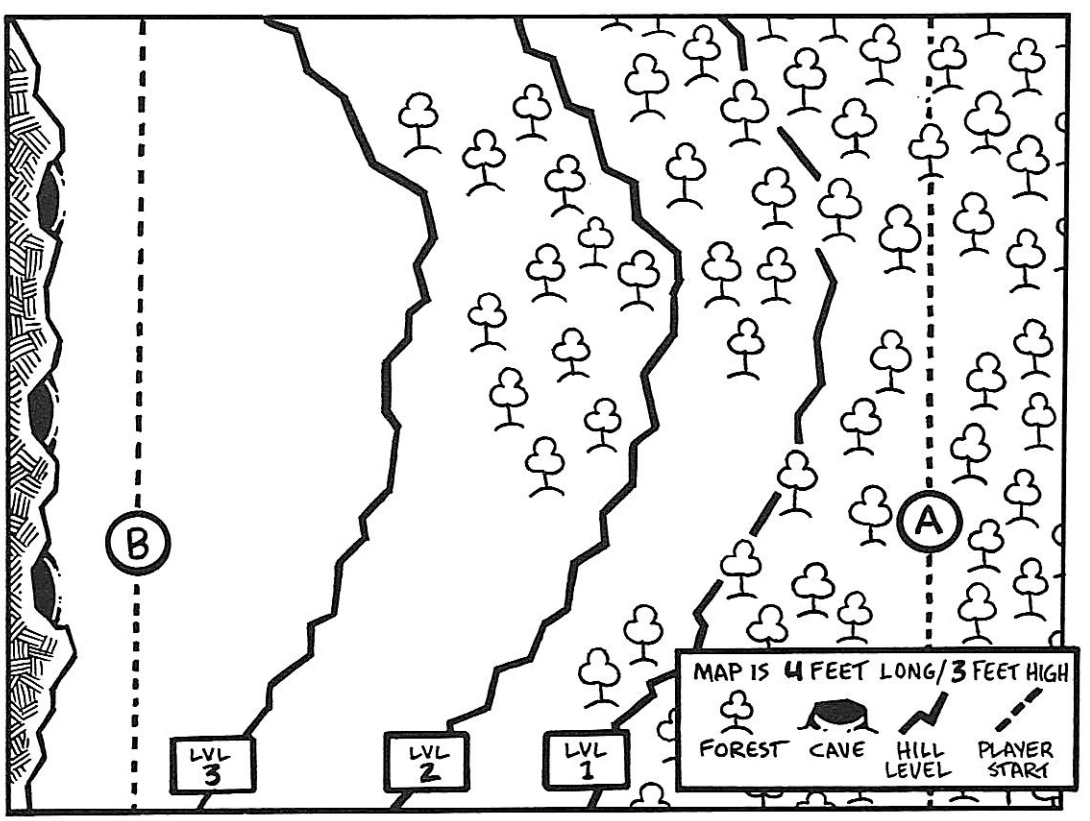
New Equipment

Hand Weapons	*Damage*	*Cost*
Knife	1+STR Dam	5
Power Fist	2+STR Dam	15

Ranged Weapons	*Damage*	*Range*	*Cost*
Blast Gun	4	12"	10
Laser Rifle	3	24"	10

Other Equipment

Flying Surfboards: Allows the rider to fly, accelerate 12"/turn, decelerate 24"/turn. If turning faster when going faster than 24", trooper is automatically thrown. Cost is 50.



Troop Statistics

Marines (Human)

STR	8
ACC	6
MIND	4
HOLES	7
MOVE	7
COST	10

All Marines start with Deluxe Armor, Jet Pack, Knife (Total cost 50).

Officers begin with a Power Fist (cost 15).

Heavy Weapons specialists start with a Flamer and 3 Impact Grenades (Total cost 15).

Other troopers begin with a Blaster Rifle (cost 15).

A squad consists of:

1 Officer, 1 Heavy Weapons Specialist, and 8 Troopers for a Total Cost of 750 Points.

Up to 50 points can be spent on extra equipment for a final cost of 800 Points.

A typical force consists of 4-8 squads and 1-5 high Rank Officers/Personalities (see section 8.0 in CC book on Personalities).

Guard (Human)

STR	8
ACC	6
MIND	4
HOLES	7
MOVE	7
COST	10

All Guard start with Basic Armor (cost 10).

Troopers begin with a Laser Rifle (cost 10).

Officers begin with a Blast Gun (cost 10)

Heavy Weapons Specialists begin with a Flamer and 2 Impact Grenades (Total cost 10).

A squad consists of:

1 Officer, 1 Heavy Weapons Specialist and 8 troopers for a Total Cost of 300 points.

Up to 25 points can be spent on extra equipment for a final cost of 325 Points.

A typical force consists of 4-8 squads and 1-5 high Rank Officers/Personalities (see section 8.0 in CC book on Personalities).

Elfkin Mercenaries

STR	6
ACC	6
MIND	6
HOLES	7
MOVE	7
COST	10

All Elfkin Mercs begin with Basic Armor (cost 10).

Officers begin with a Blast Gun (cost 10).

Troopers begin with a Laser Rifle (cost 10)

Heavy Weapons Specialists begin with a Flamer and 2 Impact Grenades (Total cost 10).

A squad consists of :

1 Officer, 1 Heavy Weapon Specialist, and 3 Troopers for a Total cost of 150 points.

Up to 50 points may be spent on additional equipment for a Total Cost of 200 points.

A typical force consists of 4-6 squads and 1-5 Officers/personalities.

Stubbies

STR	10
ACC	7
MIND	5
HOLES	7
MOVE	4
COST	9

All Stubbies begin with Basic Armor and 2 Impact Grenades (Total cost 20).

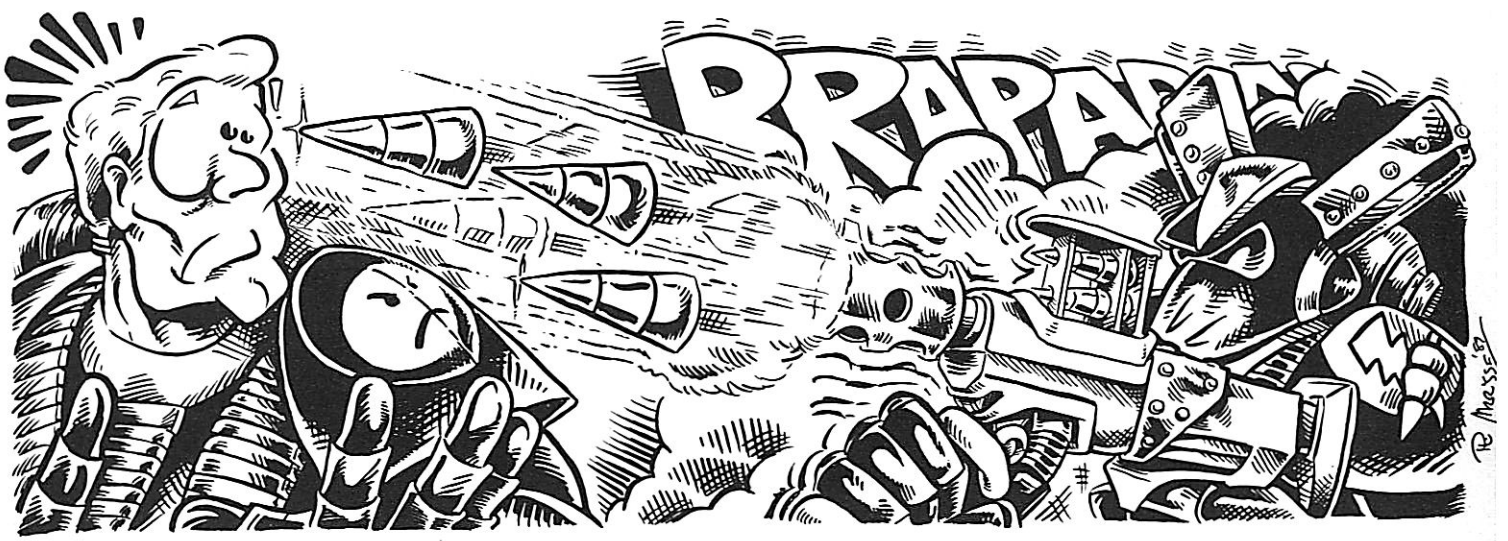
Officers begin with a Blast Gun (cost 10).

Heavy Weapons Specialists begin with a Flamer and 2 more Impact Grenades (cost 10).

Troopers begin with a Laser Rifle (cost 10).

A squad consists of:

1 Officer, 1 Heavy Weapons Specialist, and 8 Troopers for a total cost of 390 points.



Up to 40 points may be spent on additional equipment for a Total Cost of 430 points.

A typical force consists of 3-6 squads and 1-8 Officers/Personalities.

Orcs

STR	6
ACC	4
MIND	3
HOLES	5
MOVE	7
COST	6

All Orcs begin with Bulletproof Vests (cost 5).

Officers begin with Auto Pistols and 2 Impact Grenades (cost 10).

Heavy Weapons Speicalists begin with a Flamer and 2 Impact Grenades (cost 10).

Troopers begin with Laser Rifles (cost 10).

A squad consists of:

1 Officer, 1 Heavy Weapons Specialist, and 8 Troopers for a total cost of 210 points.

Up to 25 points may be spent on aditional equipment for a Total Cost of 235 points.

A typical force consists of 3-10 squads and 1-15 Officers/Personalities.

Vehicle Statistics

"Hipo" APC -Rhino

MAX SPD	*MAX ACCEL/DECEL*	*LOAD*	*DEF*	*HOLES*	*COST*
10	3/5	1200	3	10	160

Weapons are Machine Guns.

Raider Mk. 7 -Land Raider

MAX SPD	*MAX ACCEL/DECEL*	*LOAD*	*DEF*	*HOLES*	*COST*
12	3/5	400	4	10	365

Weapons consists of 2 Blasters

Hunter Killer Mk II -Predator

MAX SPD	*MAX ACCEL/DECEL*	*LOAD*	*DEF*	*HOLES*	*COST*
10	3/5	400	3	10	235

Weapons consists of 2 Machine Guns andBlasters

Jet Cycle

MAX SPD	*MAX ACCEL/DECEL*	*LOAD*	*DEF*	*HOLES*	*COST*
10	3/5	400	3	10	125

Accesories include a Machine Gun and a Flight Pack

Hover Tank

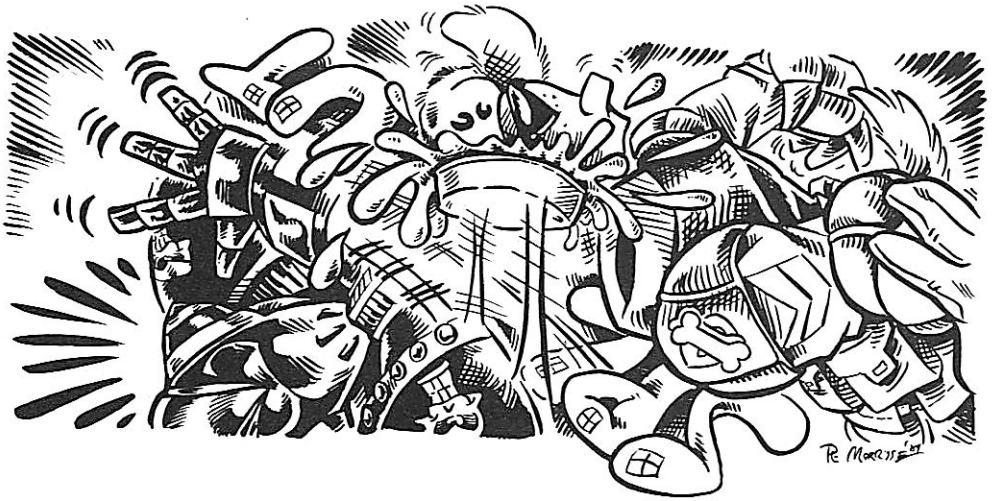
MAX SPD	*MAX ACCEL/DECEL*	*LOAD*	*DEF*	*HOLES*	*COST*
7	3/5	400	3	10	200

Weapons include a Blaster and Machine Gun, as well as a Flight Pack

Leviathan Fighting Suit -Dreadnought

MAX SPD	*MAX ACCEL/DECEL*	*LOAD*	*DEF*	*HOLES*	*COST*
8	——	200	4	6	160

Weapons included are 2 Machine Guns.



Final Comments

This conversion is by no means perfect or considered to be set in stone. If you, the reader/player has any comments or suggestions, feel free to drop me a note. Keep in mind that anything received in relation to this becomes the property of Crunchy Frog Enterprises. Sole reimbursement will come from design credit for any major idea used, and a copy of the supplement when published. Write to: Crunchy Frog Enterprises, PO Box 24532 Dept. 40K, Tempe, AZ. 85285-4532. ■

Tashtan Station:
An ALBEDO Adventure

By Paul Kidd

Writer and designer of the **ALBEDO RPG**

Tashtan station is a "whodunnit" designed for one to three players. The player characters are all civil or EDF authorities come to supervise and liaise with the directors of a zero-G contruction site in high orbit about the planet Tashtan.

Background:

Tashtan is a small colony world that hopes for a great future. In an effort to gain financial independence from its mother world of Zath, the Tashtanii government has poured funds and effort into the construction of an orbital dockyard facility. It is hoped that an orbital facility for the servicing, construction and repair of interstellar vessels will bring trade to the system. To this end, developments on the planetary surface have been sacrificed so that the orbital construction project can be given first priority.

ConFed sponsorship has been requested, and the EDF have agreed to assist in funding the project pending a settlement as to the use of the facilities by ConFed armed forces. The EDF will provide capital and construction equipment, but only if the orbital facility assumes a permanent role in resupplying, servicing and construction of vessels for the EDF.

While the Tashtanii government is keen on the idea, certain elements of the populace are less than happy about a permanent EDF presence hovering over their planet.

Another element that is less than pleased with Tashtan's orbital construction project is a clandestine alliance of outsystem business interests. These companies do not wish to see trade come to Tashtan. Indeed, they sincerely hope that the world will plunge itself into deeper financial trouble. These companies will then buy over the colony's debts and effectively become the owners of the planet. Insidious little plan, isn't it?

To this end, the companies have hired a saboteur to destroy Tashtan's orbital station before it can come into use. Unbeknownst to anyone but himself, this saboteur is posessed of a psychelectromagnetic talent — a small talent that allows her to modify the awareness of people and electonic brains. With this talent, the agent can suppress awareness or seal off data within an electronic brain. She is currently ensuring that the station will fly apart once put under spin, and is suppressing the computer monitors that would normally detect her activity or alert the staff to the faults. She has begun to kill the few people aboard the station that could threaten her project.

Player Characters:

The player character must have some reason for being aboard the station, but should not have too intimate a knowledge with the station or its personnel. A perfect solution would be for them to be EDF liaison personnel, newly arrived in system to inspect the construction work.

For a bit of fun, it can be nice to throw a bit of a spanner in the works by giving different player characters secret information. For instance, one might be in touch with the Net, another might have shady connections or political beliefs that might conflict with mision objectives. It can all add to the fun!

NPC's:

In addition to about 300 construction workers and miscellaneous clerks, suply men and technicians, the orbital site is home to the following notable residents. All personnel are skilled in zero-G movement and basic safety procedures.

Janno Faren
(Suspicious architect)
Race: Weasel
Disposition:
Devious,
Conceited
Strength: 8
Stamina: 10
Manual Dexterity: 10
Coordination: 12
Reason: 12
Intuition: 8
Drive: 12
Stability: 10
Skill areas: Structural engineering,

zero-G architecture, Computer ops, Zero-G movement.

The architect of Tashtan station. A secretive, pompous, over-sensitive character. He rarely communicates with subordinates, nor does he socialise well. Although he is an excellent designer, he grates upon the nerves of all he meets.

Janno is unhappy about the presence of EDF on his station, nor does he want a military tie-in with his project. He will react to ConFed characters with hostility.

Garwent Aeosha
(Ambitious administrator)

Race: Duck
Disposition: Greedy, Cautious
Strength: 5
Stamina: 10
Manual Dexterity: 12
Coordination: 12
Reason: 10
Intuition: 10
Drive: 13
Stability: 10

Skill areas: Admin, Computer ops, Assess person, Bargain, Forgery

The administrator of the station. A shifty individual if ever there was one. He is suspicious of ConFed characters who come onto his facility, but will greet them with a false, oily friendliness.

Garwent is involved in some minor embezzlement (and therfore his paranoia). He will keep careful surveilance of the EDF types who come aboard and wil guard his doctored computer files with great skill.

Minister Keeso
(Ineffectual politico)

Race: Gopher
Disposition: Talkative, Generous
Strength: 7
Stamina: 7
Manual Dexterity: 10
Coordination: 9
Reason: 9
Intuition: 13
Drive: 12
Stability: 13

Skill areas: Assess person, Current affairs, Public speaking, Administration, Law, Political science, Salesman.

A loud but harmless politician who has come aboard the station to publicise the project. He is very keen on impressing ConFed or EDF delegates, and will try to be as helpful and hospitable as possible.

Like all politicians, he is shifty. If trouble starts (eg. when the first murder occurs) he will try to keep the player character from becoming involved. He does not want to scare investors away from the project.

Doctor Vorgetta
(Brooding medic)

Race: Canine
Disposition: Laconic, Responsible
Strength: 10
Stamina: 10
Manual Dexterity: 12
Coordination: 10
Reason: 14
Intuition: 9
Drive: 8
Stability: 9

Skill areas: First aid, Medical, Psychology, Surgery

A taciturn but competent medical doctor. This character actually has a shady past. Once known as Doctor Pitr Chorko, he has assumed a new identity and is fleeing from his homeworld of Zho-Chaka where he is wanted by local and ConFed authorities as a terrorist.

As such, he will be extremely suspicious of EDF characters and will avoid them at all costs.

Alicia Dekkis
(Eager young female computer op)

Race: Rabbit
Disposition: Friendly, Reckless
Strength: 6
Stamina: 12
Manual Dexterity: 10
Coordination: 14
Reason: 10
Intuition: 10
Drive: 12
Stability: 11

Skill areas: Art, Assess personality, Spin yarn, Computer ops, Electronics, Computer systems engieer.

An utterly lovely individual. Young, cheerful, and on the pretty side of plain. She will be more than happy to befriend strangers. Alicia could prove to be a valuable ally since she has top access to security files and knows the station's robots and computers better than anyone else. She intensely dislikes Katje Lattri.

Katje Lattri
(Sullen female computer op)

Race: Fox
Disposition: Conceited, Exacting
Strength: 7
Stamina: 10
Manual Dexterity: 10
Coordination: 12
Reason: 10
Intuition: 8
Drive: 13
Stability: 8

Skill areas: Dancing, Musician, Philosophy, Computer ops, Electronics, Computer systems engineer.

Absolutely, heart breakingly beautiful, Katje is the local "ice queen". Cold, arrogant, elegant. She will seldom condescend to speak with lesser mortals. For some reason, males seem to insist on falling in love with her. Katje couldn't care less, but sometimes strings a suitor along for a while before letting him crash.

This character could be a prime suspect. It can also be fun to have a player character fall for her.

Jo-Beth Jho
(Gorgeous media personality)

Race: Feline
Disposition: Amourous, Devious
Strength: 5
Stamina: 9
Manual Dexterity: 12
Coordination: 14
Reason: 12
Intuition: 12
Drive: 12
Stability: 12

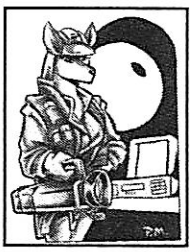
Skill areas: Assess person, Bargain, Current affairs, Mingle, Public speaking, Repartee, Snitch

Suave, sexy and shimmering with charisma, Jo-Beth Jho is a media personality from the Tashtanii media nets. She is on location to cover the story of the orbital station's construction and opening.

Jo is simply exquisite. Cute and elegant, she has an unnerving habit of undressing men with her eyes as she talks.

Even so, she would never indulge in "extracurricular activity" unless it was for a purpose (eg. to gain a "scoop" or a promotion). She would never keep secrecy over a story, and mercilessly twists people to her advantage.

Zhu Liau
(Female media technician)



Race: Deer
Disposition (on the surface): Friendly, Cautious
Strength: 10
Stamina: 11
Manual Dexterity: 9
Coordination: 11
Reason: 10
Intuition: 15
Drive: 10
Stability: 8

Skill areas (on surface): Camerawork/photography, Assess personality, Current afairs, Mingle, Scrounge, Electronics.

Hidden skills (all at training level 12) include Handguns, Demolitions, Sneak, Hide, Detect hidden, Unarmed combat, Melee combat.

The Saboteur! A gorgeous female deer with great, green eyes. Always under the shadow of Jo-Beth Jho, she seems slightly down-trodden and sad. She just gets on with her job and wryly ignores Jo's posturing and devious machinations. Zhu is a very nice person to talk to, although she is very shy and hard to get close to.

So much for the mask she shows to the world. In reality, Zhu is a vicious assassin. Amoral and utterly without remorse, she has been responsible for a number of ruthless acts of sabotage and terrorism. Her services do not come cheaply. She enjoys her work. Zhu is one of the best.

Zhu has a psionic talent. She can suppress the awareness of organic and mechanical brains, effectively making herself invisible. This sort of effort is physically very tiring (becoming more so as she tries to deal with more and more people). Major efforts will utterly exhaust her. Zhu can also monitor the surface thoughts of people around her, as long as she is not too tired.

These psionics are very useful. She can mentally control robots and computers (as long as her concetration remains undisturbed). She can become "invisible". The only way to catch her is in a trap, or to encounter her when she has utterly drained herself from extended use of her powers. A very dangerous foe!!!

Gerterhard Gyff
(Construction crew manager)

Race: Bear (Panda)
Disposition: Straightforward Responsible
Strength: 16
Stamina: 9
Manual dExterity: 9
Coordination: 7
Reason: 12
Intuition: 8
Drive: 10
Stability: 13

Skill areas: Structural engineering, Demolitions, Operate heavy machinery, Electronics, Computer ops.

A calm, competent engineer, he keeps very much to his own counsel. He never indulges in gossip or rumour mongering and has little patience for those who do. A difficult character to pump for opinions, Gyff would usually refrain from making comment until he has first hand experience of the topic. Thus, when he suspects that there may be structural faults within the station, he goes off to inspect at first hand rather than sharing his suspicions with anyone else.

Reeka Lahti
(Environmental manager) + **Eeepi Lahti** (a furry little baby)

Race: Flying possum ("sugar glider")
Disposition: Talkative, Friendly
Strength: 7
Stamina: 8
Manual dexterity: 10
Coordination: 14
Reason: 8
Intuition: 12
Drive: 10
Stability: 6

Skill areas: Assess personality, Bargain, Snitch, Poetry, Biology, Ecological science, Ecological systems engineer, Socio-History.

A true chatterbox, Reeka is a prime source of gossip, rumour and jokes. She keeps a constant ear to all the latest news, and delights in passing it on. Reeka is not malicious, and will often edit hurtful information.

An attractive lady, Reeka has an infant daughter called Eeepi. Eeepi is about five months old and is confined to her mother's pouch. Quite a sweet little rug rat — all wide eyes and soft fur. Reeka usually works while her daughter snoozes away in her pouch.

Reeka is a flying possum. She has a prehensile tail that can be used for grasping "handholds" and which acts as a handy anchor line. She also has flaps of skin that stretch from wrist to ankle on either side of her body. With these, she can modify her flight path when performing zero-G maneuvores in an atmosphere.

The Station:

The final form of Tashtan station will be a central rotating spine surrounded by a revolving ring (containing crew quarters, recreation facilities and work places). This final form will only be reached in the far future. For the moment, the plan is to produce a central spine with two rotating booms. At the end of each boom there will be a large habitat module. These habitats can be expanded at a later date once the station needs to grow.

Tashtan stations is still largely incomplete. The central spine of the station is effectively finished. The next stage will be to complete the habitat modules. Once this is done, the modules will be placed under spin and work will continue on the factory facilities in the central spine.

Currently, the entire facility is under zero-G conditions, with the work crews living in temporary quarters in the station's spine. Muscle tome is maintained by compusary excercise in the gym. There is a busy daily work schedule. The "zee gee" teams (men and robots) work around the clock to complete the framework of the station. These workers spend most of their day in vacc suits or inside small construction craft supervising and sassisting with welding and extruding out in the vaccuum of space. Other workers are busy inside the pressurised sections of the station installing fittings and electronics. Meanwhile, a sizeable team of programmers and engineers supervise and coordinate the efforts of the construction robots, who are doing most of the actual work of building. There is a workshop that repairs and modifies

robots. A programming and design department monitors the overall picture and assists the engineers and architects in their work. Every few days, new construction materials and relief personneld arrive from the planet below.

A busy place Indeed!

The Saboteur:

Zhu's evil plan is to make the station fly apart once it is placed under spin — a disaster that should finish the whole project! To this end, she has tampered with the architectural department's materials stress models on the computer (both on site and on the planet). Zhu has modified the original plans for the station to incorporate her special modifications, doctored the records of construction materials ordered, and all looks just as it should be.

Zhu plans a devastating disaster. The great pylons that will hold the spun habitats will not bear up to the strain, and will fly apart (not immediately — but eventually they will do so, and it will be calamatously sudden when it does occur).

The only people who could detect the faults are the station's architect and chief engineer. Zhu will see to it that these individuals suffer "accidents".

Murders:

Zhu will get busy arranging "accidents" shortly after the player characters arrive on station.

Murder #1

The station's architect, Janno Faren, will be inspecting the site-work out at the pylons. All seems well, when suddenly his EVA pack flares and he rams himself into the side of the structure. His suit was punctured. The computer quickly took over his EVA pack and brought him into a pressurised area, but it was too late. Janno Faren had died of axphixiation.

There are no indications as to why the architect suddenly fired his jets. Computer records show that he was calm and controlled. He had been unusually quiet in the hours before the accident, but had not given any indication of suicidal or reckless tendancies.

The real story? Zhu had picked up Janno's sudden suspicion of her sabotage plans. When Janno went out to inspect the work at first hand, Zhu contrived to be in the main computer room along with the computer operators, Jo-Beth Jho, Garwent Aeosha and Minister Keesho. Zhu quietly took over mental control of the computers and thus took remote control of Janno's EVA pack. Exit one zero-G architect! The computer's awareness of these acts was supressed. In the general confusion, no one noticed Zhu's fatigue (although security monitor records will show her to have been distracted and tired at the time the accident was occuring).

Murder #2

Next person on the hit list is Gerterhard Gyff. He will be found dead in his offices. Zhu killed him when he began to perform a serious search of the station's plans and work records. Suppressing the awareness of the monitors, Zhu injected Gyff with a poison that induces death in a similar manner to a massive stroke. The first thing anyone knows about the death is when the computer suddenly notices his dead body.

The computer should have been aware of any emergency as it happened. No one can understand how the computer failed to detect Gyff's attack and alert the base's medics. The only explanation is that the computer itself is malfunctioning.

There are few clues. An intensive autopsy performed at medical facilities on the planet Tashtan could discover that Gyff was poisoned, but the orbital station's medical apparatus has no chance of discovering this. A detailed search of Gyff's computer time over the 24 hours before his death will reveal strange blank spots — sections of computer memory erased without a trace...

Murder #3

A near murder rather than the actual thing. If the action is slow, Alicia Dekkis can come under attack. Alicia will dive into the computer memory and discover that there are cleverly concealed "blank spots" in the security monitor memory — moments in which the computer's awareness of events has simply faded out. Alarmed, she will try to contact the player characters.

While on her way to the player characters (late, late at night), she finds that the main travel shaft is inoperable (my — how strange...). She takes an alternate route down a cramped, spooky little service shaft. Oh what a surprise — the doors all close. Oh what a surprise, there is a hiss of escaping air. Oh what a surprise — one of the player characters just happens to be nearby and hears a frantic hammering on one of the hatches...

Zhu is watching everything on monitor camera. Now the player character right at the top of Zhu's hit list...

As usual, the computer knew nothing of any pessure losses or jamming of doors.

Clues:

Few and far between! Zhu is very good at her job, although she having to use her power rather to overtly on this job. It will soon become obvious that someone is tampering with the computers somehow, without even the AI being aware how it is done.

If an independent stress model is run to test the safety of the station's pulongs, they will be shown to be unsafe! It will then become clear that someone has deliberately installed the faked models in the station's and planetary engineering department's computer data bases. People who have had access to both machines include the architect, engineer, Jo-Beth Jho and her camera crew...

Catching Zhu:

Eventually the players should be led to conclude that Zhu is a likely culprit for the murders. This is where the fun starts.

Zhu Liau is very hard to catch. She can sense surface thoughts, evade monitors, blank the minds of opponents. The Net is aware of people that have such abilites. If quizzed, it can inform selected individuals of the existence of talents. It can instruct characters on methods which might help combat a "talented" individual.

> Characters can keep thoughts hidden behind a "smokescreen" of trivia (roll Drive vs. Zhu's Drive to successfullly peform this little trick).

> A simple trap could be set up. Beware of traps involving electronics, or that are under the eye of monitor cameras.

This task is going to require quite some ingenuity. Once detected, Zhu will try to kill anyone who suspects her existence or make good her escape from the station depending on the circumstances (remember that she is one hell of a smart lady). She should be defeatable, but players will have to work hard to do so! ■

FOLK MAGIC

by Sandy Petersen
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In the worlds of **RuneQuest**, a vast majority of people are not adventurers. They farm, fish, herd, hunt, and work at their trades is peace. Since magic is so easily available in **RuneQuest**, they must have some, too. Of the three types of **RuneQuest** magic, the most convenient for the use of a commoner is spirit magic. Divine magic is too costly and, though devout worshipers of their gods would certainly know one or two divine spells, most prefer to let their priest specialize in this powerful magic. Sorcery takes too long to learn. Also, once a sorcery spell is learned, the hapless user starts at only a minimal chance of success till he works his way up through experience.

Spirit magic is cheap, easily cast, and readily available. Most cults teach it to their worshipers, and people living in rural areas can also obtain it from local shamans.

But what spells would an ordinary person have? What use is Firearrow or Spirit Screen to a farmer? Would a tailor waste time and money learning Ironhand? Here follows a list of the **RuneQuest** spirit magic spells which are especially used to ordinary people and the reasons why.

Befuddled: This spell probably originated as a party spell. If your life is not in danger it might be enjoyable to be Befuddled, in much the same way that it might be enjoyable to be thoroughly, rousingly, drunk. If you can't afford a bottle of wine, you can always Befuddle yourself for five minutes of cheap entertainment.

Bladesharp: This spell is called Plowsharp among non-warriors, and is a favorite farmer's spell. When the plow man comes to an especially hard clod of ground, he casts Plowsharp to help him cut through it. Other obvious users of this spell are butchers, tanners (who have to skin dead animals), and lumberjacks.

Bludgeon: The carpenter's friend. Every carpenter, builder and shipwright knows Hammeright (sometimes called Bludgeon). Set up the nails, cast Hammeright, and knock'em through in a fraction of normal time.

Coordination: The non-combat uses of this spell are obvious.

Darkwall: This can provide a needed bit of shade during a break from work, or when out on the desert (if you're a nomad). This spell might be suppressed by the government, for it also serves as a good thieves' spell at night — hide in a doorway and cast Darkwall, and the night watch'll never spot you.

Detectance: Anyone who has ever lost anything in a cluttered barn or workroom can see the value of this spell. Detect Silver (for lost coins), Detect Fire, Detect Linen, and Detect Wool (also good for finding lost sheep) are all handy for a tradesman or housewife. Detect Gold or Silver can also be useful for pointing out counterfeit coins by taking a coin of proven value and placing it further away from the spell caster than the suspected counterfeit. The caster is automatically led to the coin of greater gold content.

Disruption: Better known as Kill Rats, this spell is a proven vermin-eliminator. It can also amuse you on a hot summer night as you sit back and zap flies attracted to you lamp.

Endurance: Most manual laborers known this spell and use it every day. It gives you a second wind at need.

Extinguish: A housewife's spell. Also a good safety spell, permitting speedy and efficient dousing of flames whether or not water is handy. Extinguish 1 puts out a frying pan fire and Extinguish 2 puts out the cooking fire.

Farsee: All herdsmen seeking lost sheep should have this spell. It is also useful for watching the sky at night, especially in seeing some of the planets.

Glamour: Anyone who has ever gone on a date has doubtless yearned for this spell. Simply turn on the charm at special moments. Since Glamour only lasts five minutes, choose said moments strategically.

Glue: The manifold uses of this spell to housewives and tradesmen alike are too obvious to need much repeating, but gluing two folds of linen together while hemming a garment, gluing a dog's leach to a rock while rushing into the store to buy some goodies, or gluing a small child's pants seat to his chair when he gets too squirmy at dinnertime are all functions that can appeal to the inventive Glue user.

Heal: No one should be without this spell. It is good for emergencies as well as scrapes, cuts, and bruises. Housewives need it for their children, delivered no doubt with a kiss, and for their husbands, perhaps delivered the same. Herders need at least Heal 2 for their livestock.

Ignite: This makes starting the morning fire a snap, and also eliminates needs for cumbersome firesticks, flint, or steel. Most homes consider such implements to be sacred objects, useful only when you want to make things difficult for yourself.

Light: A great spell when you wake up at night and need to see for a few minutes or make it back to the outhouse without tripping over a stump or a sleeping pig.

Lightwall If you need a brighter light than Light, this is the one to cast. It can also be moved by mental effort of the caster, unlike Light, so its bright glowing panel can be moved high overhead where it lights up an entire yard or street. Good for when the dogs all bark at once, or just being the local busybody.

Mindspeech: In the marketplace it can get too noisy to hear oneself think. And a merchant might need to ask an assistant for information without alerting customers. Mindspeech is the answer. Of course, thieves' lookouts use this spell to silently sound an alarm.

Mobility: Need to catch the stagecoach? Finish plowing before nightfall? Outrace the nasty Henderson kid? Mobility is the spell for you.

Protection: A blacksmith can use it to quickly grab a coal out of his oven (don't hand onto it too long, though, because the heat will burn through in a few seconds). A woodworker can use it to keep from getting splinters. And you can cast it on valuable objects to keep them from harm at strategic moments.

Repair: Another spell whose non-combat uses are so obvious that they do not bear repeating.

Second Sight: A good spell for detecting prowlers at night without being detected in return, or for aiming thrown boots at yowling cats in the dark.

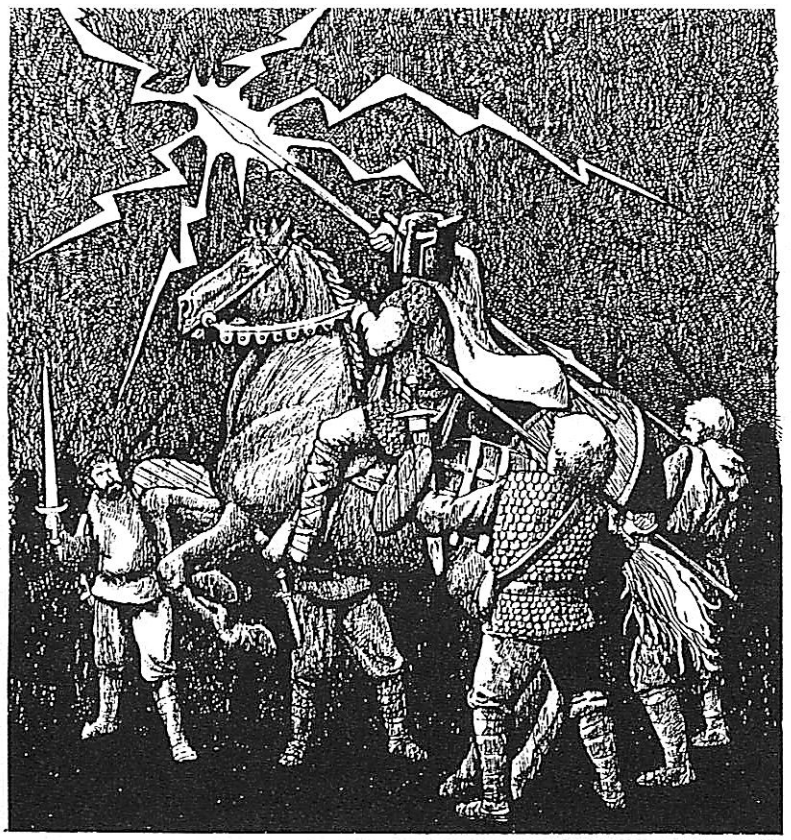
Slow: It's sometimes hard to catch a chicken for dinner, or a child for a deserving spanking. Slow helps a lot. And you don't tire yourself out, unlike Mobility.

Strength: for lifting heavy objects, plowing, or even just playing with a group of kids, this spell is most helpful.

Other spells have non-combat uses, too. The gamemaster should use his imagination, and so should the players. ■

Loose upon the winds of the tempest, astride his fierce steed, is a rider, a creature of rage, a creature of the storm. It is said that you can see him dancing over the gray clouds, urging the winds onward to greater ferocity. When his anger is especially fierce, he descends to the earth to wreak havoc on the good folk, leaving only flaming hoofprints behind. Some say he was a man whose passion overcame him, and who now looses his rage upon the winds of the storm. The magus Grimgroth insists he is an elemental, a magical incarnation of the air. Others say he is a foul demon, a Horseman of the Apocalypse, sent to earth to torment the good folk of the valley. However, all of them know him as...

The Stormrider



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Bringing Back the Solo

by WG Armintrout

Solo or "choose your own adventure" game books have had a hard time in recent years. When I first became interested in gaming, products like Metagaming's *Death Test* and the Flying Buffalo solitaire adventures were a fun diversion when face-to-face gamers couldn't be found.

But then came the lean years. Mainstream publishers, scenting potential profits, came out with a flood of unexciting products aimed at the sub-juvenile market. TSR got involved, but didn't have the editors to handle the complex product — few of their books were playable. Solo adventures got a bad name after a few years of products like these.

I became professionally involved with solos in 1987, when Steve Jackson Games (SJG) and TSR signed a deal to co-produce a series of *Car Wars* paperback solo adventures. I was SJG's editor-in-chief at the time, and ended up doing a little of everything (editing, art direction, production management and rules development) on the first four books in the line. I went on to write the fifth book.

Since then, I've written four other solos for SJG's *GURPS* roleplaying system. I think I'm the only writer in the field working regularly on solos today. If there's to be a renaissance for solitaire adventures after the mediocrity of recent years, I suppose it's up to me.

What this article is about is what I've been trying to do lately, and where I'm trying to take state-of-the-art solo adventure design.

The Pick-A-Path Books

First, let's discuss the prime elements of a solo adventure.

These books are usually made up of numbered paragraphs or entries, with the paragraphs provided in some order other than their natural progression. Starting with an introduction, the reader is guided from one paragraph to another, generating a different story with each reading.

Most paragraphs end with a *decision point*, where the player gets to decide something. "The hungry snake is lunging for your larynx. Do you wish to fight it (302), flee from it (188), or invite it out to lunch (666)?" The numbers in parentheses after each option are the paragraph numbers to turn to if the player chooses that option.

This is the most basic type of solitaire adventure, the pick-a-path adventure. When I first started writing solos, this was the pattern already inscribed in my brain — from seeing so many written in that style, I suppose. What I figured, therfore, was that the more interesting decisions which the player had to make, the more fun the book would be to play. I also thought that the purpose of a solo adventure was to generate an entertaining story.

Well, that's partially true. What I was quickly to learn was that there were other kinds of solitaire books that could be written.

Books with a System

My first project was *Mean Streets*, the SJG/TSR *Car Wars* project I mentioned earlier. It was to be a typical pick-a-path adventure, with only a little bit of a twist — the game had a real combat system.*

Adding that new element meant quite a bit to the ultimate design of the product, more than I realized at the time. In the *Car Wars* books, whenever a player got into a shooting situation (either on foot, or in his duelcar), he would resolve the fight using some pretty simple rules explained in the front of the book. The combat had nothing to do with picking a path, except that the path-picking set up the situation that caused the fight.

The *Car Wars* series wasn't the first to combine a combat system with picking a path, but it was the first to make the combat system halfway interesting. As a designer, that gave me some new options. In the "traditional" part of the book, I sketched out the usual fast-action story, with lots of entertaining decision points and branching sub-plots. Yet, I was also able to place lots of combat sequences in the manuscript.

The end result was a book that was more "gamey" than the usual solo, without losing the storytelling element. The player became more involved thanks to the desperation of "make my Laser roll before he gets me with that Gauss Gun" — and I realized that this was a good complement to picking a path, which can become monotonous or passive after a while. Mixing the two made a stronger adventure.

The Game and the Book

I explored that idea a little further with *Beyond Thunder River*, a licensed Conan solitaire adventure for the *GURPS* roleplaying system. It was the same situation as in *Mean Street*, only more so: Not just a combat system this time but an entire roleplaying system to mesh with a pick-the-path adventure.

With the new elements, I did two things that were a little bit new:

The first was actually an old trick, resurrected. The first solo that I ever played was *Death Test* (from Metagaming, written by Steve Jackson). As you played through the adventure, if you came to a combat situation, you used the rules from another game — *Melee*, a boardgame — to set up the battle and fight it out. The fight's outcome would determine what paragraph the reader went to next.

I did the same thing with *Beyond Thunder River*. When Conan blundered into trouble, the player got to "duke it out" — appropriate for Conan, I thought. A variety of sketch maps were provided in the back of the book so that the reader knew how to set things up for each fight. I wanted lotsw of variety.

The second thing which I did, almost without realizing it, was to emphasize much more a different kind of paragraph ending, one that wasn't a decision point. It was a *skill roll point*. The reader would get to a paragraph like this: "The hungry snake lunges for your neck. Try to Dodge roll, to see if you escape. If you succeed, turn to 202. If you fail, turn to 888."

By stirring more of these decision point graphs into the book, the style of the adventure changed. Beyond Thunder River is a combination of pick-your-path and make-your-roll — your fate often depends more on your die rolls (and the stats you chose before play)—than on the player's decision — making skills. In the right combination, I think it gives the reader the notion that while he can decide some things, others are beyond his control. And even in the case of storybook heroes, that's the truth.

Solo without a Story

My next project was a complete leap into uncharted territory. I knew that SJG wanted something for their *GURPS Horseclans* product line. I also knew they had this new Mass Combat System, a set of rules for enacting a battle in roleplaying terms (rather than boardgaming or wargaming it).

What I got to wondering was this:

Could a solo be built around the Mass Combat System, showing the career of a young mercenary (in this case, the hero Bili the Axe from the novels) over a couple of years?

The end product, *Up Harzburk!*, was a solo where the system (the game element) was more important than the story. In a lot ways, the book was more mechanical than literary. The reader designed his character, and sent him off to war. Except for occasional interludes, the adventure which the book generated told of battles and scrapes, promoted officers and traitors exposed, and lots of opportunities for players to fight out "micro battles" involving thier own characters, and then see the effect of that fight on the greater battle going on around them.

I was surprised by the playtest response. *Up Harzburk!*, being system-based rather than story-based, was able to pack more play value in the same number of pages than a traditional solo. (Actually, due to an editorial error, it also ended up with more pages than any other solo I've written!) Some of the playtesters loved that knid of play value and were ecstatic in their praise, but they surprised me by comparing it against *Beyond Thunder River*. To my mind, that was like comparing apples with tennis balls — while the two books were both solos, they were very different adventures.

What I discovered was that all solos didn't have to be "literary." *Up Harzburk!* was more of a game than a story, and yet it still generated an entertaining roleplaying experience.

The Pickless Adventure

After time off to write a non-solitaire adventure, I returned with *For Love of Mother-Not*, another licensed product based on the Alan Dean Foster book of the same name. Working on licensed products, where I had a plot, background or subject that I needed to be faithful to, was a great aid in fostering creativity. It helped me try new things without realizing that I was pioneering.

The difference between Flinx's adventures in *For Love of Mother-Not* and the typical solitaire adventure was that this was a chase-the-bad-guys plot, and the hero was a teenage psychic mutant whose mental powers were unpredictable, and whose physical abilities didn't amount to much. If he had been Conan, the adventure would have cared what *he* wanted to do — Conan is tough and the world gives way for him. But in the case of Flinx, both in the novel and in my adventure, there are a lot of situations where the world puts a big roadblock in Flinx's path, and he simply has to try and "make his roll."

In short, there wasn't much of a path to pick. Yes, Flinx decided what to take with him on the journey, but his ability to track is mostly governed by his Tracking skill rolls, and when danger springs at him, he is more likely to need to make some kind of survival roll rather than to make a decision — or he doesn't get the luxury of making a decision unless he first "makes" his roll.

I worried about how the playtesters would respond. As I mentioned earlier, I came into the field thinking that decision points were the highlight of play — and this book didn't have many,. Yet the playtesters were quite happy with the manuscript.

After the book was published, I sat down with it and — several months removed from the agonies of writing and rewriting — played it. And I learned something. I learned that making decisions is hard work, and that some times it can be more fun just to roll the dice and see what happens. *For Love of Mother-Not*, for me, is both fun and relaxing. There are no battles to set up, few records to keep — just play, make your die rolls, and see what happens.

It proved to me that all solos don't have to be pick-a-path, and that the non-picking adventure can be fun as well.

Harmony on a Theme

Since *For Love of Mother-Not*, I've written two more solos, both currently (as I write this) in the throes of processing at SJG. Both reflect some of what I've learned from previous projects.

Conan the Wyrmslayer is a short Conan solo that tries to break out of the solitaire mold a little bit. Most of it is in the pick-a-path tradition, mixed with a few rousing combats on the icy glaciers of the Eiglophian Mountains. One segment of the book deals with Conan's exploration of a labyrinth of ice caverns beneath the galcier. (A "dungeon," if you want to use crass terms — but hopefully a creative, interesting dungeon...)

What makes the labyrinth episode a bit different is that the sequence of chambers truly is random. The reader is given a blank cavern map, and as he explores, he filles in the blanks with paragraph numbers provided by the book, most of which lead to brief but exciting encounters. This means that the labyrinth is different with every play.

I like the fill-in-th-map aspect, especially as it makes record keeping fun. It also keeps *Wyrmslayer* from falling into the rut of "just another solo adventure..."

Moon of Blood is the sequel to my earlier *Beyond Thunder River*, although its styule is more heavily influenced by *For Love of Mother-Not* (with a soupcan of *Up Harzburk!*). Conan starts out in a no-win situation, and things only get worse before they get better. With traitors, hostile sorcerors and giant jungle apes on the prowl, Conan finds that he needs to make his rolls, or he won't get to make any more decisions.

So it's more like *For Love of Mother-Not*, a fun-to-roll-and-play, see-what-happens-to-me kind of book. The touch of *Up Harzburk!* comes from the fact that there are two major battles which come up, and I used a simplified Mass Combat System to resolve the action. There is a fair share of fights to set up and resolve, but not as many as in the earlier Conan products.

One new angle I was able to get away with this time was that skil rolls made early in the game come back to haunt the reader. The adventure acts as if it has a memory. I hope this gives the reader more of a sense of suspense as he plays this one.

More to Come?

I enjoy writing solos, and I'd love it if what I'm doing can bring back the interest in solitaire adventures that died away under the avalanche of mediocre stuff in years past. On the other hand, being realistic, I have to admit that it's an uphill battle — if there doesn't prove to be an audience for what I'm writing, or if I can't get people to give solos another try, then the publishers will stop publishing it, and I'll just have to write more "GM'd" adventures.

For the time being, my contracts call for two more books — one more Conan solo, then a small sequel to *For Love of Mother-Not*. It's far too early to say what they'll be like, except to say that I'll try to keep innovating.

After that? Well, as the old comic book line used to say, "it's up to you, dear reader."

Footnotes

*My comments on Mean Streets apply to its first edition. SJG is preparing to release a new edition of the book, this time reconfigured to use straight *Car Wars* rules rather than the simple system used in the TSR/SJG series. ■

Variants for Dr. Who

By Wesley Kawato

For those of you who like the television series, the Dr. Who board game is the next best thing. Players take the role of a time lord, moving around the board, in an effort to become the first player to collect the six parts of the Key of Time, and return to Gallifrey. It is a fast, simple game that can be learned in one setting. But like any simple game, it becomes predictable with frequent play. Let me introduce a few variants that will remedy this problem. The first involves companions. Each time lord starts with a +2 companion, based on real characters from the show. Let me introduce several that were left out. Each of these companions are +3 companions, but are unreliable.

An unreliable companion is one that has a chance of deserting, defecting, or losing a key part. There are three such companions: Jo Grant, Taylor, and Turlough. A player, at the start of the game, may choose to take an unreliable companion, rather than a regular one. Each of these new companions are described below.

Jo Grant

In the television show, Jo Grant was known for her clumsiness. Therefore, any player who controls her must make a roll on the 12-sided die at the end of each turn. On a roll of 11 or 12, she loses an item or a key part, chosen randomly by one of the other players. This item or key part is placed in a random zone, generated through the use of the random zone rule in the rule book.

Taylor

In the television show, Taylor was known for his cowardice. Therefore, the player controlling him must make a die roll each time he is about to enter combat with an alien. On a roll of 1-8, Taylor remains to fight. On a roll of 9-12, he deserts you immediately. He will remain behind in that zone after you leave. He will never rejoin you, but may be picked up by another time lord.

Turlough

Finally, Turlough had his own motives for travelling with the Doctor, namely wanting to return to his home planet. He was often tempted to betray the Doctor by villains offering a quicker trip home. Therfore, each time the player controlling Turlough is about to enter combat with an alien, a die roll must be made. On a 1-8, Turlough remains loyal to you. On a 9-12, he defects, either to another player (if present in the zone) or to the alien being fought, determined randomly. If he has chosen to join forces with an alien, after the battle in which he defects he is removed from the game permanently. If he has chosen to join forces with another player, the player may keep him as his companion. Note: this does not exempt the player from the one companion rule.

Another interesting variant is allowing one of the players, in a game involving at least three players, to be the Master — the Doctor's arch enemy. The Master has +1 strength, just like any other player. Also, he starts out with a +2 companion called the Rani. The Rani functions as a normal companion, except that she will work for no one except the Master (she is too evil to work for anyone else.) The Master will destroy (remove from the game) any key part he finds. The Master wins if he can destroy enough key parts to make it impossible for any player to win.

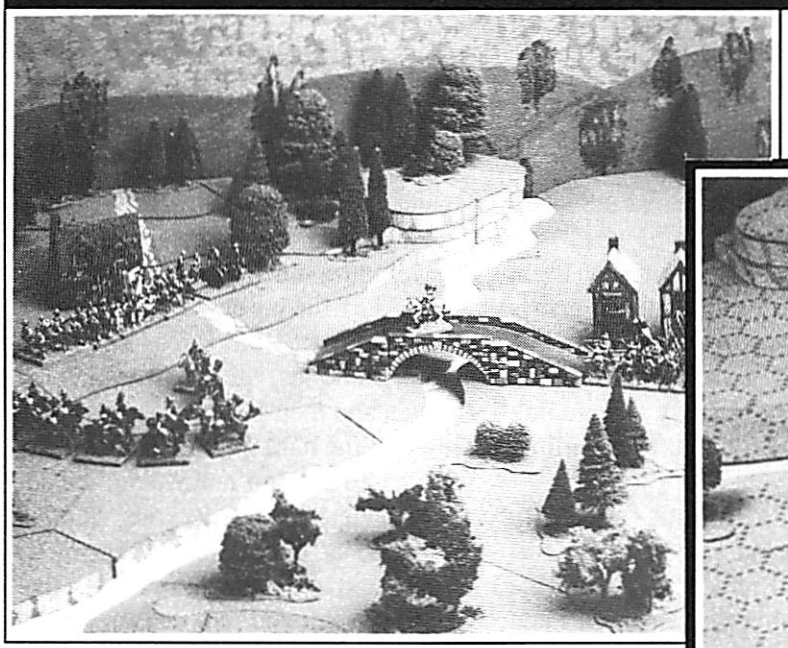
If the Master is one of the players, then the following rule should also be used. Allow players to go to the planet Gallifrey to use the time lords' vast computer network in order to locate new key parts. This will cost the player one of his two allowable actions each turn. A 12-sided die is rolled. On a 1-4, a destroyed key part is returned to play, using the random zone rule. Each time a key part is brought back into play, two other key parts in the dead pile are permanently eliminated. That means there must be at least three key parts in the dead pile in order for a player to use the computers on Gallifrey.

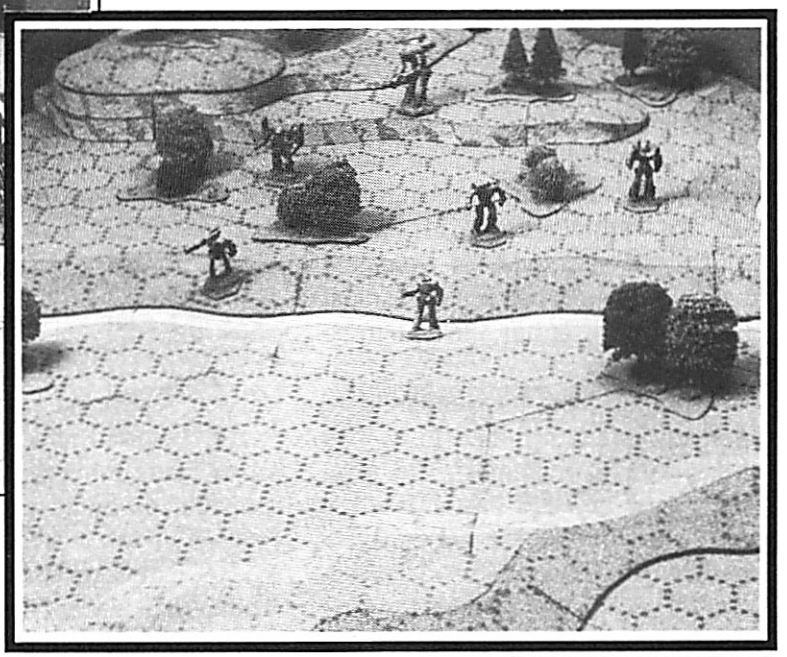
If the Master is in the game, six key parts are placed on the board, scattered in random zones for him, using the normal set-up rules even though he is not out to build the Key of Time. (He is still considered to be a time lord.) No changes are made to the initial set up.

A third possible variant deals with the stun rules. In the regular rules, a player who is defeated in combat is stunned. This rule adds some variations: after a player is defeated, roll a 12-sided die. On a 1-6, he is stunned, as per the regular rules. On a 7-9, your companion is killed, and you lose the rest of your turn. On a 10-12, your companion is killed and you are recalled to Gallifrey, to stand trial for endangering the lives of your companions. Your counter is immediately moved to Gallifrey. You must remain on Gallifrey until you can roll a 1-4 on the die. You may roll the die once per turn.

These variants, used singly or in combination should add new life to what I consider an old classic. One last note, inclusion of the Master will increase the number of combats between players, making the game more action packed. ■

THE REVOLUTION ENTERS A NEW PHASE





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The Killing Ground

By Gary Reilly

The four Thorssi horsemen rode in silence, the long day's ride stiffening their joints. Their mounts were silent, too, plodding a straight course across the great expansive plain. Other than the rythmic creak of leather saddles, the soft thuds of iron-shod hooves in the dirt and the occasional clink of shifting armor, the drab troup traveled noiselessly.

All about them, the plain stretched for many miles, hemmed in by two distant mountain ranges. The level ground was dry and brittle, like the tiny foam's bones. The horses threw up tiny puffs of dust with each step. A gentle breeze caught the dust, blowing it away or depositing a little on the horses and their riders.

Save for the short, yellowed palo grass and the rare clumps of dry, wind-twisted scrub, the land yielded no sign of life, which was just as well as far as Muorlan was concerned. The less life, the less he and his weary companions had to worry about encountering any troublesome creature. The monotonous flatness of the ground was the reason he had chosen to cross the plain rather than skirt the large flat valley. The rocky mountains along either side of the plain would have provided the riders with some protection, but just as easily could hide any number of lurking threats. The innumerable deep clefts offered shadowy cover for a mother Rashan stalking a meal for her voracious cubs, or for a band of savage Kaballian bandits hoping to surprise a lonely trade caravan. Better the open plain that offered little chance of surprise. Mourlan shifted slightly, resting his free hand on the worn pummel of his sheathed blade.

The sun disappeared beyond the whitened peaks of the western range, casting long shadows across the plain. Shortly thereafter, the reddish sky darkened into keep azure as night claimed the heavens. The breeze across the plain turned cold, chilling the riders. A fine mist slowly rose from the warm ground, gradually enveloping the men and their mounts in a swirling, thick fog.

Muorlan's mount suddenly missed a step, its ears standing forward. Muorlan reined to a stop, the other riders doing the same. His hand gripped the broadsword at his side, pulling it a few inches out of its leather sheath, exposing the polished Volgen-hammered blade. Slowly, carefully, Muorlan pulled himself upright in the saddle, twisting his head from side to side, listening. Yes, there it was again. A faint noise carried on the wind. A low, plaintive horn-like sound, rising, then falling, reminding Muorlan of the death wail of the Wodabeast. Seconds crawled past, then the sound came again, slightly louder, perhaps nearer. Horses stamped in expectation. Four weapons were pulled free from sheaths, held low at the ready. The riders sat wordlessly, each trying to pierce the dense mist with his widened eyes.

The Killing Ground

The vast plain was the site of an ancient battle between two massive armies. The two forces clashed in a series of skirmishes over several days. Battle lines constantly changed under the fluid conditions. On the fourth day, a final, massive battle occurred. The fighting went on throughout the day and into the darkening evening. Both commanders committed their reserve troops to what must be the decisive battle. So intense was the struggle that the plain lay under a thick cloud of dust, hiding much of the combat.

The fifth day dawned, revealing a great carnage. Both forces lay in tattered shambles, the great armies lay beaten and their blood mingled, soaking into the hard ground. Neither side possessed enough remnants to be declared victorious. The gods were so ashamed at the terrible waste of so many men in an indecisive contest that they were moved to curse the battlefield. A great earthquake rocked the plain. The earth split and fractured, swallowing all the members of the two armies, the living along with the dead. Within minutes, all traces of the battle and the combatants were wiped from the face of the earth.

Over many years, eroding rain and wind wore down the ragged surface, leaving the plain flat again. Yet life itself continues to shun the area. Animals of the neighboring lands refrain from returning to the region, keeping to the natural boundaries. Even insects shy from invading the dead soil.

Under the curse, the spirits of the warriors rise each night to continue the futile fight!

Encounters on the Plain

Adventurers are free to wander into the area as they pass along their journey. In crossing the plain, however, they should become aware of the region's supernatural nature. Among the random encounters/hints are the following:

1. The plain becomes very cold at night, despite the season of the year.

2. Regardless of the seemingly dry environment, a thick mist rises at sunset. This fog restricts both normal sight and infravision. It swirls in constantly changing eddies, blown by the ever present night breeze. The mist settles at first sunlight.
3. The wind carries very faint sounds. These include the clamor of combat and distant war horns. Animals, such as horses and dogs, are likely to be aware of the sounds before adventurers notice them. Horses become skittish; dogs howl or wimper for no apparent reason.
4. Noises also emanate from the ground itself. Nearly subliminal in nature, these can be heard only when lying on the ground, as one sleeps, for instance. The sounds are the muffled moans of the long-dead warriors buried deep beneath the surface. Sleeping on the plain is frequently restless and filled with unnerving dreams, the exact content of which is lost upon waking.

The Face of Battle

At any time during the night, the adventurers may come face to face with members of the ghost armies. On a random encounter roll, the sounds of battle come nearer, increasing in volume. Suddenly, the mists part to reveal a fragment of the eternal combat. (This may be a pitched battle between the opposing forces, or it may be a contingent from one side which appears to be charging the adventurers' party.) When encountered, the vision is completely realistic and believable. The spirits seem to possess corporeal bodies, the din of battle sounds true. Although the combatants emit a general shroud of magic (which may be determined by a detect magic spell), they appear real. Attempts to disbelieve the scene as an illusion have no effect.

At this point, each of the adventurers must make a critical saving throw *below* his/her wisdom. Fighters add a +4 die modifier to their rolls; thieves and clerics +2; magic users -2. Failure to roll beneath the wisdom attribute causes the character to be overtaken by a sudden bloodlust. These adventurers rush forward to join in the combat.

Characters who make a successful saving throw remain in control of themselves. However, they must elect to become involved with the battle by actively attacking or defending. Any character who willingly becomes engaged with the spirit warriors is swept up with the battle, becoming one of the cursed. The struggle continues its momentum, taking the affected characters along with it.

Those individuals who roll succcessfully and decide to take no part of the fighting remain totally untouched. They can follow the battle but are ignored by the combatants. Nor can they interact with their enchanted compatriots.

The tide of battle swings back and forth throughout the night. As daybreak approaches, an illusionary earthquake rolls across the entire plain, dragging the warring spirits into the bowels of the earth. This includes any of the adventurers who were unfortunate enough to be caught up with the battle! They disappear along with their equipment. No trace remains as the sun returns to light the plain.

Rescuing the Lost

Having joined the ranks of the ghost legions the unlucky characters fall under the curse. Each evening, they rise with the other spirit warriors and spend the night reenacting the ill-fated battle, only to be engulfed by the quake that follows. This cycle continues forever unless the characters can be rescued by an unaffected party. (Once a character has make a successful saving throw to avoid getting embroiled with the spirit battle, he does not need to make additional rolls regardless of how often he encounters the ghosts.)

The cycle can only be broken by casting a remove curse spell. (Dispell magic and other attempts have no effect on the spirits.) In this situation, the spell takes on an extended area of effect. In addition to affecting the individual target, the spell encompasses all the spirits within a 50-foot diameter circle.

Once cast, the spell disrupts the curse entirely in this area. Any spirit who was part of the original ancient battle is free to find its final resting place, appearing to waver and dissolve. The effect on the spirit who was not in the original combat is to restore the person to his/her original condition, regardless of the amount of time that has elapsed since the character's initial involvement. Thus, a person entrapped over 100 years ago would return at the same age, in the same condition and with the same property. (This can be an interesting method of introducing a new character to the party of adventurers!)

Keep in mind that it may prove difficult for the unaffected characters to locate their friends as the battle is constantly changing. It is likely that cursed characters will become separated, requiring several day, or even weeks, of searching by the rescuers.

This scenario offers a way of throwing your players a bit of a monkey wrench without necessarily causing real harm. It might also give them some food for thought when presented with the option to fight or otherwise handle future encounters. ■

Fantasy Trip Talents: Expanded and Abbreviated

By Lawrence Person

All right all you TFT fans (and I know that there are thousands of you out there—somewhere), have you ever had trouble fleshing out your NPCs because they were little more than statistics on 3"x5" index cards? Did you try to add some life to them by listing their talents, only to find that you couldn't fit them on those same said 3"x5" cards? Well then, cry no more. Included in this article is a list of TFT talent abbreviations that will make it much easier to keep records on NPCs, not to mention the records for player characters, and, most importantly, this table will be instrumental in reducing writers cramp.

Plus, as a special bonus, I have included a few new TFT talents to boot, namely...

New Talents

IQ-8

Si-(2)-(SI)— These are the oriental double daggers, used in each hand, with the curved, blade-locking hilts. A figure with this talent can attack (treat as a normal dagger attack) and parry (+2 on attackers roll) at the same time with no DX penalty. Takes ST-8 and DX-12 to use.

Bagh-Nahk (1)-(BN)— This is the indian tiger claw weapon. It consists of four or five curved or straight spikes attacked to a crossbar which is held in the hand with the spikes sticking out between the fingers. The bagh-nahk does damage like a cestus, but since it is not strapped on it can be dropped in one turn, just like any other weapon. Otherwise it is like a cestus.

Thrown Spell (1)-(TS)— This takes the place of the wizardly component of the Thrown Weapon talent. (C'mon, you didn't really believe that throwing an axe and throwing a spell involved the same skills, did you?) Costs triple for non-wizards to learn.

Missile Spell (2)-(MS)— Same as above, but for missile spells.

IQ-9

Juggling (1)-(J)— Though the bard talent includes the ability to juggle three, four, or five objects, plus daggers, axes, flaming torches, etc, a street juggler can make $10 a month over subsistence.

IQ-10

Trance (2)-(TR)— The priestly counterpart of the IQ-16 spell. Only for campaigns where the priest talent "works". Prerequisite. Priest.

IQ-13

Poison (1)-(PO)— The character possessing this talent knows how to recognize, make and use the various weapon poisons, mammal poisons, and the magical contact poisons, without having to learn either chemist or alchemist. He also knows how to treat poison wounds. Note: To make some of these poisons may require access to a chemical or alchemy lab.

Talent Abbreviation for the Fantasy Trip

A	-	Alertness	EN	-	Expert Naturalist	RT	-	Remove Traps
AB	-	Acrobatics	F	-	Farming	RV	-	Recognize Value
A/B	-	Architect/Builder	FC	-	Fencing	S	-	Sword
AcH	-	Acute Hearing	G	-	Guns	SA	-	Sex Appeal
AH	-	Animal Handler	GS	-	Goldsmith	SB	-	Shipbuilder
AL	-	Alchemy	H	-	Horsemanship	SC	-	Scholar
A/M	-	Ax/Mace	K	-	Knife	SH	-	Shield
AR	-	Armourer	L	-	Literacy	SK	-	Sha-Ken
AV	-	Access Value	LS	-	Lasso	SM	-	Silent Movement
B	-	Bow	M	-	Mimic	SPY	-	Spying
BA	-	Bard	MA	-	Master Armourer	SS	-	Seamanship
BG	-	Blowgun	Math	-	Mathematician	ST	-	Spear Thrower
BL	-	Bola	MB	-	Master Bard	Str	-	Strategist
BO	-	Boating	MFI	-	Monster Followers I	SW	-	Swimming
BR	-	Boomerang	MFII	-	Monster Followers II	T	-	Tracking
BS	-	Business Sense	MH	-	Mechanician	Tac	-	Tactics
C	-	Climbing	MM	-	Master Mechanician	TF	-	Thief
CB	-	Crossbow	MP	-	Master Physickar	TH	-	Theologian
CG	-	Courtly Graces	MT	-	Master Thief	TW	-	Thrown Weapons
CH	-	Charisma	MW	-	Missile Weapons	2W	-	Two Weapons
CM	-	Chemist	N	-	Naturalist	UC1	-	Unarmed Combat I
CP	-	Captain	NC	-	Nunchuks	UC2	-	Unarmed Combat II
CT	-	Cestus	NF	-	New Followers	UC3	-	Unarmed Combat III
D	-	Diplomacy	NG	-	Naginata	UC4	-	Unarmed Combat IV
DG	-	Disguise	N&T	-	Net & Trident	UC5	-	Unarmed Combat V
DI	-	Diving	P	-	Priest	V	-	Veteran
DR	-	Driver	PW	-	Pole Weapons	VET	-	Vet
DT	-	Detect Traps	PY	-	Physicker	W	-	Woodsman
E	-	Engineer	QS	-	Quarterstaff	War	-	Warrior
EH	-	Expert Horseman	R	-	Running	WP	-	Whip

Mundane Talents listed as is. ■

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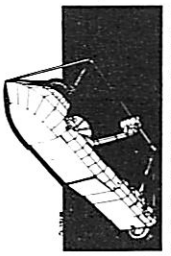
THE STORY OF SPACE: 1889

It was as a result of intense intellectual conversations between Professor B. Etienne Moreau of the Sorbonne and American inventor Thomas A. Edison



that the latter devised a practical use for the luminiferous ether. Its nature suggested to Edison a device which could "sail at speeds heretofore undreamed of through the luminiferous ether." It was, in fact, a quirk of fate which forced his first such invention to fail—his prototype could not overcome the atmosphere—forcing Edison to set his sights toward the airless heavens. The space age had begun.

Edison himself made the first manned voyage in an ether flyer of his own invention, accompanied by Jack Armstrong, a Scottish soldier of fortune. The two managed to pilot their craft via hydrogen balloon high enough to allow their ether propeller to take hold. Unfortunately, their landing on Mars was not as smooth, and the balloon was damaged. The expedition would have been stranded forever were it not for the fact that the planet was inhabited.

Edison and Armstrong were taken prisoner by a local Martian potentate, Amraamtaba IX. Armstrong learned the

language, and Edison impressed the ruler with his tremendous knowledge. The pair were soon freed, and Edison was provided with the materials necessary to repair his balloon. Within months the repaired flyer was ready to carry Edison, Armstrong, and a curious Martian back to Earth. The expedition landed safely outside Cincinnati on the 7th of August, 1870.

Earth was electrified. Edison and Armstrong received fame and fortune. Within a year, dozens of companies were manufacturing Edison Flyers, and flyers of several nationalities were soon making regular trips to Mars. The British established a permanent quarter in the Martian city of Parhoon. Belgians and French quickly followed suit, establishing themselves as colonial powers. The Germans turned their attentions to Venus, a world covered with harsh swamps and inhabited by ferocious dinosaurs. Edison had opened a cornucopia of worlds and markets for the colonial powers of the Earth, the backdrop for the adventures of a lifetime—**Space: 1889**!

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Faulty Magic in *Call of Cthulhu* or Hey! That's Not a Deep One! That's — Aaargh!

By Kevin A. Ross

In most **Call of Cthulhu** adventures the bad guys are armed to the teeth (so to speak) with magical spells capable of obliterating the health and sanity of even the strongest investigator. Occasionally the investigators may come across a moth-eaten tome and wish to learn a spell or two of their own. Sure it takes a long time, and it may cost a little SANity, but ofttimes the spells are more than worth the price that must be paid.

But what if that nasty, enemy-breaking bit of sorcery didn't work the way it was supposed to?

In the existing rules for magic in **Call of Cthulhu** there are no considerations for misunderstanding or miscasting spells. As it is, the prospective sorcerer merely spends 2D6 weeks studying the spell and then attempts to make his INTelligence roll based on the book's spell multiplier. If he makes it, he knows the spell; if he blows it, he goes back and tries again.

But what if he rolls 96-100 while trying to learn the spell? What if he THINKS he's learned the spell, but in actuality he's misread it? Or perhaps he's learned it so that it backfires. Maybe he just didn't learn the spell at all. The following is a list of suggestions for foul-ups for each of the basic spell types. (The keeper might also wish to use these same rules for spells already known by the caster; if the sorcerer rolls 96-100 while casting the spell a problem such as one of those listed below occurs).

Summon, Bind or Contact Servitor Race: A summoned creature should always appear, but that's where its complicity with its summoner ends. A spell of this type gone awry may cause the creature to attack the caster or his companions, or foul up the orders it's given. What if TWO or MORE of the summoned beasties show up instead of the expected one? Worse yet, the wrong type of creature may appear — most unfortunate if the summoner doesn't have the appropriate binding spell... As for a botched binding spell, maybe the caster just didn't learn that spell at all, or the creature was banished instead of bound.

Call, Dismiss or Contact Deity: Once again, what happens if you get a "wrong number"? Perhaps the sorcerer learned the call spell but not the appropriate dismissal. Or maybe the god decides to attack any and all in its presence regardless of whether friend or foe. A contact spell may turn its caster into an avatar of the desired god.

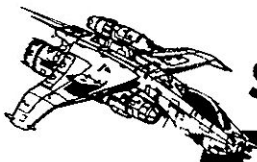
Enchantments: Items for creature-summoning may have the opposite effect than that desired by the sorcerer (ie. they REDUCE the chance of summoning the creature) or they may enrage the summoned creature(s). Gates may not go where (or when!) they're supposed to, or they may kill their users or drive them insane. Zombies may attack their makers. Defenses like the elder sign or the barrier of naach-tith might not have been learned at all. Space mead might turn out to be JUST a good draught, and no protection at all against the chill of interstellar space travel.

Attacks: Backfiring would probably be the most likely malfunction for this type of spell. Or attacks that effect both target AND caster. Mind exchange or transfer spells may strand their users' minds forever outside their bodies while leaving the target unscathed.

Defenses: The most obvious answer would be that the sorcerer didn't learn this type of spell at all, leaving him or her very confident but very vulnerable.

Miscellaneous: Again backfires or opposite effects are good ideas. Look to the past instead of look to the future. Instead of find gate, destroy gate. Consume likeness or body warping of Gorgoroth may work once and then leave their caster permanently in the assumed form.

To keep things fair (and possibly give outmatched investigators a better chance) the keeper should use these rules for the villains as well as the good guys. Of course he may wish to give beings with higher INT (17+) less of a chance of misreading a spell — say 99-100 instead of 96-100. ■



Space Master:

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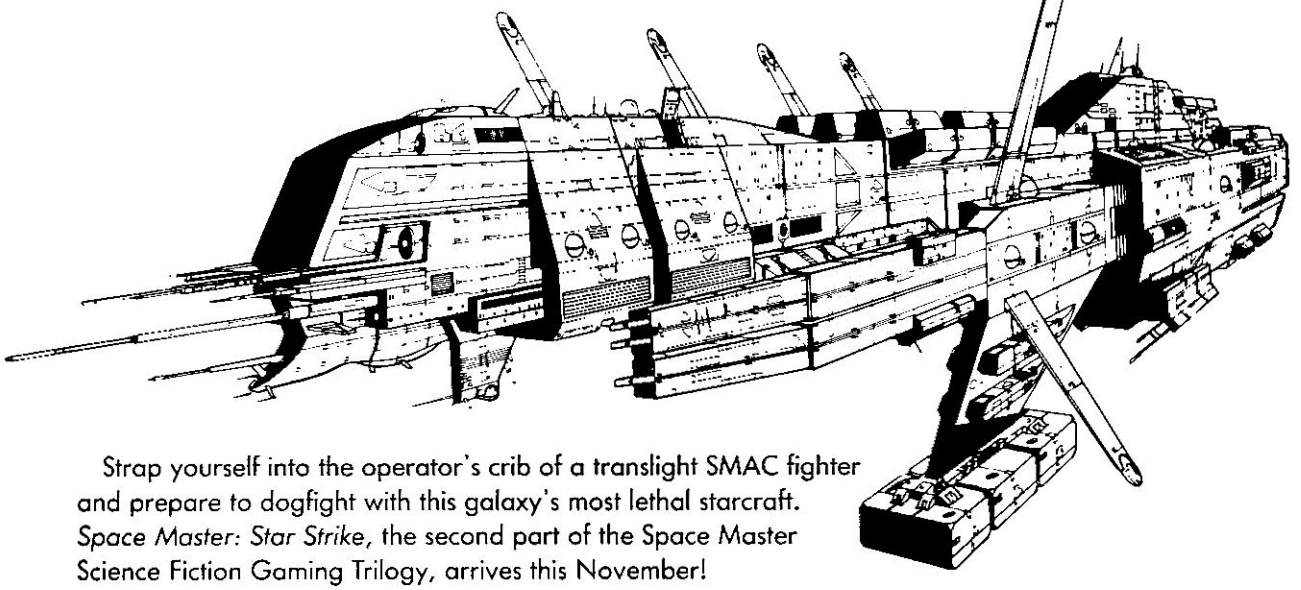

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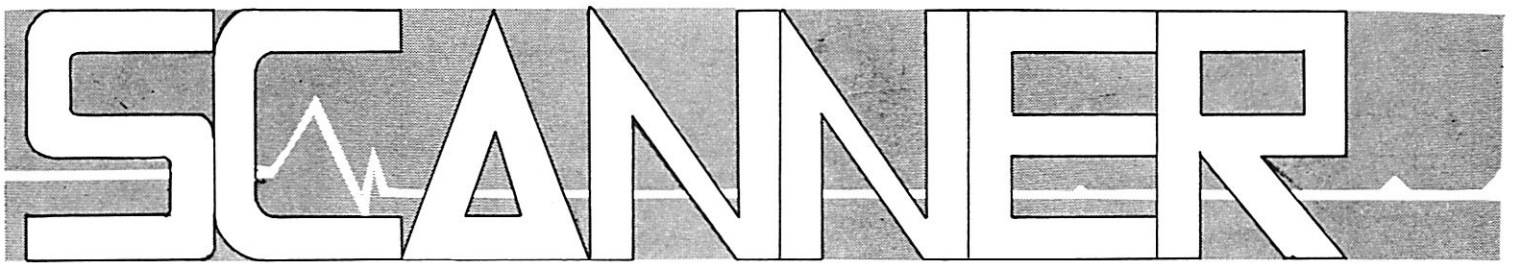

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Lion Rampant

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(Revised)
Whimsey Cards
(3rd Edition)
Saga Pack

A Review of

SHADOWRUN

By Lester W. Smith

I have to admit that when I first heard that FASA was coming out with *Shadowrun*, a new role-playing game that combined cyberpunk and fantasy, I groaned out loud. The thought of elves, orks (FASA's spelling most of the time), trolls, and sorcerers rubbing elbows with cyber hackers, corporate samurai and biker gangs seemed just too silly to believe. But when FASA's sixteen-page promotional booklet became available, I gave it a read and I was immediately glad that I had. In the booklet, FASA managed to make the promise more than just plausible; they made it exciting. So I eagerly anticipated the release of the game itself. I picked a copy up at GENCON and I was not disappointed. The promo book had led me to expect a lot from the game, and I soon learned that *Shadowrun* went far beyond those expectations.

Overview

First, the game's physical appearance is impressive. It is a hardbound book, two hundred and sixteen pages long, with a colorful Elmore painting on the front cover and plenty of interior art including thirty-two pages of color. The cover has a glossy coating that looks as if it will wear well and the binding is high quality, ensuring that it won't split and spill pages with repeated use. The inside front cover and flyleaf carry a map of Seattle (the city that player characters will most likely start their adventures in), with a key that identifies nearly sixty different locations of note on Seattle's streets. This map is also reproduced on the inside back cover and flyleaf.

The table of contents runs three pages, double column, with listings by chapter and major/minor subheadings. Since the book does not have an index, the thoroughness of the table of contents becomes very important for finding specific material during play.

Introductory Material

Introductory material begins with a short overview, approximately one page long, to let the reader know just what the game is all about. A four-page piece of mood-setting fiction comes next (the Elmore cover is based upon this story), followed by eight pages of history.

Games often have a difficult time of giving players enough history to establish their characters, without giving them so much that they lose interest in reading further. *Shadowrun* deals with the problem respectably; the history seems just a bit rushed and fragmented, but it provides the most important information without bogging down.

To put that history in a nutshell, in the world of *Shadowrun*, megacorporations have filled the power vacuum left by the decline of national governments, and a five-thousand-year natural cycle has completed itself, bringing magic back to the planet. Under the influence of that magic, wondrous beasties have reappeared and much of humanity has transmogrified into the legendary races of elf, dwarf, ork, and troll. As well, technological advancement has kept its current frantic pace, leading ot the interfacing of human nervous systems and mechanical constructs (a near-essential concept in cyberpunk).

The Basics

Following the introductory material, there are four pages of basic game mechanics, the core rules upon which all others hang. Shadowrun uses only six-sided dice. Typically, a player will roll a number of dice equal to the pertinent attribute or skill level of his character. Dice are not added together; instead, the roll of each die is compared to a particular target number, and the player counts how many of his dice equals or exceed the target number. For example, if the player were rolling five dice for a target of 3, the dice might come up as 1, 2, 4, 4, and 5. In this case, the player has rolled three successes. Rolls of 1 always fail. Rolls of 6 are rerolled, with the 6 being added to the new number (and if that number is another 6, the die is rolled again and added on, and so on). This allows players to reach target numbers of 7 or higher.

Other concepts described in this section include definitions of *Archetypes* (pregenerated characters that serve as the bases for most player characters), and the *condition monitor* on the character sheet (which keeps track of physical and mental damage to the character, as well as damage to the character's cygberdeck, if there is one).

The concept of *damage code* is also explained here. A damage code consists of a number, a letter, and another number, such as 3M2. The last number represents how many successes must be rolled to raise (attacker) or lower (defender) the severity of a wound. The letter represents the basic wound severity, whether Light, Moderate, Serious, or Deadly. The first number is the target number for the defender's roll to reduce wound severity. All damage in *Shadowrun* is handled by use of such codes, including mental drain from casting spells.

The concept of skills, including concentration and specialization, is explained in this section. Also described is the difference between shamanic magicians (who draw their powers from spirits of nature) and hermetic magicians (who approach magic as a science). Finally, a basic description of the matrix, the realm of the computer cybernet, is given.

Characters

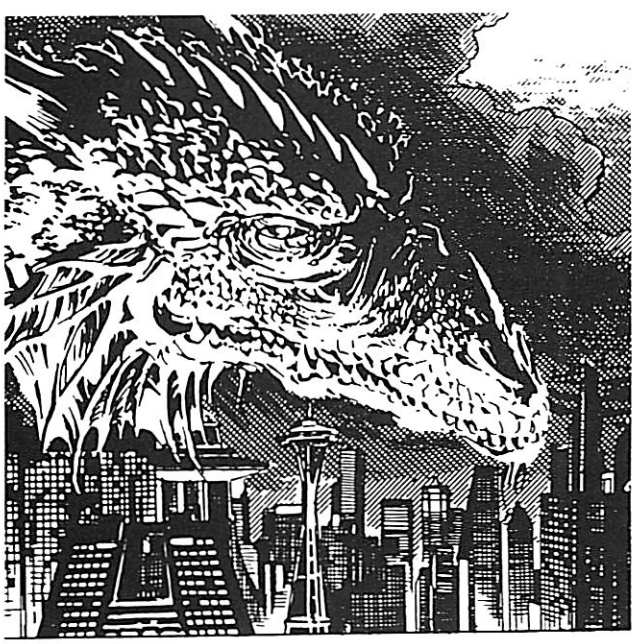
Shadowrun devotes six pages to descriptions and illustrations of *metahumanity*: dwarves, elves, humans, orks, and trolls. These descriptions are given in pseudo-scientific terms, lending them an air of veracity, which builds upon the believability of the history given earlier.

Next come three pages of rules for

character generation, followed by sixteen, full-color pages of character archetypes, one archetype per page. The artwork devoted to the archetypes is more cartoonish than other artwork in the book, but it grows on you after awhile. Archetypes include the Burned-out Mage, the Decker, the Former Wage Mage, the Former Company Man,the Rigger, the Ork Mercenary, and others.

The next four pages of the book are devoted to working out the details of your character. Things such as beginning credit balance, skill specializations, languages, contacts (more abou them later) and, if your character is other than human, checking for allergies (silver, plastic, sunlight, and iron), are included. These four pages also give rules for modifying archetypes or creating new ones from scratch.

The next chapter is entitled "Using Skills." Here you find not only skill descriptions, but also rules for setting the target number necessary for success in performing tasks. A "Level of Success" table tells how well your character succeeds at a task based upon the number of dice that reach the target number. Level of success can help a referee to decide such things as how much information to give a character, based upon his questioning of an NPC, for example. The chapter also includes a "skill web", a wire diagram that indicates how many dice you should reduce a skill or attribute by if your are using it in place of the most appropriate skill. A character with a Quickness of 6, for example, could fire a pistol as if he had Firearms: 3.



Combat, Magic, and the Matrix

Shadowrun's combat chapter runs twelve pages in length. Initiative is explained first: roll 1D6 (rerolling sixes, remember) and add it to your Reaction attribute. Highest totals go first, and really high initiatives get more than one action per turn.

Fire combat is explained next: you make a success test to shoot someone, adjusting damage upward for extra successes, then he gets to use his Dodge, Body, and Armor to reduce the damage. If he drops it below Light, he takes no damage. There are no rules for hit location, but wound severity fills in nicely, keeping combat pretty fast and furious, with lots of dice being rolled. As well, there are plenty of modifiers that can be applied to the target number to hit allowing for situations such as characters shooting blindly through walls to hit oponents on the other side.

Damage is explained in detail in this chapter, followed by rules for autofire (a smartgun can walk autofire past friends without hitting them), grenades, melee combat, critter combat (FASA's term), subduing, and vehicle combat.

A chapter on magic follows the combat chapter. It includes rules for shamanic and hermetic magic. Each magical character must choose one or the other during character creation. The chapter runs twenty-four pages and contains more information than can be adequately described here. There are totems to be chosen, nature spirits and elementals to be conjured, and astral plane to travel and do combat on, rules for ritual magic, and six pages packed with specific spells to cast. Once again, everything hangs on the basic concept of success tests.

Almost another magic system in itself, the matrix section follows. It runs twenty pages in length. This is the single best set of net-running rules I have seen to date. Characters can buy and modify seven different types of cyberdecks, or they can build their own. They can even use a standard keyboard terminal and viewscreen, if they don't mind being a "tortoise," or they can jack in without any deck at all, if they don't value their lives very highly. Rules for movement and combat within the matrix make this electronic world seem very real. As a referee, I was happy to discover that while travel between "nodes" in the net is nearly instantaneous, actions within a node take up a three-second turn, just as in combat outside the net. This, and the possibility of a viewscreen to let party members watch their netrunner's progress, helps to avoid the problems involved in refereeing an adventure session that contains both netrunners and non-netrunners.

The next twenty-four pages are devoted to equipment for shadowrunners. Besides the text descriptions, seven pages are given over to equipment charts, and the whole chapter is broken somewhat with equipment illustrations. In first running the system, I was gratified to hear oohs and ahhs as my players viewed illustrations of their rigger's vehicles and drones.

Background Material

After the equipment chapter, *Shadowrun* devotes ten pages to subjects that concern events between adventures. Here are the rules for healing from wounds, fencing the goods your character has snagged, keeping up your character's social lifestyle, and the use of karma (the *Shadowrun* equivalent of experience points). The healing, fencing, and lifestyle rules help flesh out characters' lives between major shadowruns, and in doing this, they provide many opportunities for minor adventures. The karma rules explain how character benefit from experience. Basically, karma can either be used like a reservoir of luck, changing die rolls during an adventure, or it can be spent between adventures to increase attribute and skill levels (attributes cannot be increased beyond racial maximums, however...except by invasive surgery, of course).

The remainder of the book is pretty much dedicated to material for the referee, although it wouldn't hurt for players to read much of this as well. There is a ten-page chapter that contains instructions and advice to the referee, with explanations of how skills are to be used during play, a system for generating netrunning matrixes, and guidelines for awarding karma to player characters. This chapter also has a delightful glossary of 2050's slang to spice up your play sessions.

The next chapter has stats and illustrations for NPC contacts your player

character will have in the city. These contacts can serve as potential sources of aid, information, or trouble during the course of the adventure. They include such character types as bartender, dwarven technician, gang boss, troll bouncer, and many others. There are twenty-two contacts, two-to-a-page, with a one-page introduction, for a total of twelve pages.

The single longest chapter in *Shadowrun* is the "Critters" chapter, at thirty-four pages. This chapter is primarily concerned with magical creatures ("Awakened" creatures, to use the *Shadowrun* term), but the two pages of charts that finish the chapter contain stats for more mundane animals as well. Sixteen pages of this chapter are full-color plates depicting some of the nastier critters. But even the creatures that didn't rate a color plate are impressive.

The book finishes up with a four-page chapter concerning the Pacific Northwest, followed by six pages devoted specifically to Seattle. Finally, there is a six-page introductory adventure and a set of pull-out pages containing character sheets, NPC and vehicle sheets, and two pages of reference tables collected from various chapters of the book. The sample adventure is a very entertaining opportunity for trying out the combat and magic rules. I won't spoil it by revealing any details, but suffice it to say that it worked well for introducing my players to the *Shadowrun* milieu.

Shortcomings

There are a few problems with the game, primarily editorial in nature. The impression I gained was that the system had been carefully thought out and tested, but that it had then been written and edited in a rush.

There are some obvious typographical errors, for example. The Seattle Map on the inside covers and flyleaves, for instance, have a key that identifies fifty-eight different locations, yet the map has locations numbered up to sixty-seven. The map itself skips numbers 19, 62, 63, and 66. As a result, there is one location on the key that does not show up on the map, and there are six locations on the map that do not show up on the key. The problem is not critical — the map is still extremely useful — but it is a problem nonetheless.

Another slight problem is that the term "UGE syndrome" occurs occasionally in the book, but to the best of my knowledge, the initials UGE are never deciphered. A few important terms in the game are also left vague. In particular, the character archetypes have notes concerning who their contacts might be, and those notes are often in the form of "Any Street Type," or "Any Corporate Type," yet the contacts section of the book does not identify who is a street type and who is a corporate type. With street types, especially, each referee will have to make his or her own decision as to who should be included.

There are a few other typos, but they do not cause a lot of trouble. The writing itself, however, can often be confusing. I have mentioned that the background history is written very sketchily, but that it may simply be a function of keeping that section short. There are other sections in the book, however, where that sort of sketchiness makes the rules very difficult to understand. Examples of rule use are often provided, and they are always very clear, but where there are no examples, the reader is left to guess as to the designer's meaning.

On page 53, for instance, rules are given for creating your own archetypes. The intent (according to the example, and according to the designer's comments on GENIE) is that you have one 0, one 1, one 2, one 3, and one 4 to spend on the archetype creation chart. But the rules simply say that you spend from 0 to 4 on each column and that the final total add up to 10. By those rules, you could spend two 0's, one 2, and two 4's, for example, which is obviously not what was intended.

The combat chapter also has a few such problems. In particular, the rules never identify how many rounds of ammunition are used in a burst. Nor do they specifically say that if you fire extra bursts at a single target, you should roll your total skill dice for each dice instead of splitting them among the bursts. Since there is no example to draw from, each reader is left to puzzle out the exact procedure from comparing explanations of fire at a single target to explanations of fire at multiple targets. In doing so, readers are forced to hang their understandings upon one or two important words, words whose exact meanings can easily be debated.

Even more problematic is the matrix chapter of the rules. In this case, the problem seems to be almost completely a cause of faulty editing. The system seems to work very well, but the rules are not organized in an easy-to-use format. While reading through one section, all sorts of questions arise that are not addressed until the topic is taken back up under later sections. I suggest that as readers go through this chapter, they keep a log of questions that occur to them, then mark those questions off as later sections answer them.

I could also wish that more of the charts and tables from the rules were repeated in the pull-out section at the end of the book, but this is a relatively minor complaint.

Summation

Despite the problems mentioned, I found *Shadowrun* to be an extremely satisfying product. I was able to introduce new players to the game fairly easily, and the excitement level was high throughout play. The game suprised me in the amount of material it included; you could say that it covers three worlds (physical, astral, and matrix), with numerous inhabitants of each, and three magic systems (shamanic, hermetic, and computer). Everything I could think of a referee needing to run a campaign is included in the book. Combat is designed to be fast, furious, and fun. In all, *Shadowrun* is a very visual game system. That is, it encourages imagery and role-playing, without bogging down in overly dry rules.

At $28, I believe *Shadowrun* to be a very good buy. ■

The Art of Storytelling

A review of Lion Rampant's *Ars Magica* (Second Edition)

By J.M. Caparula

In this age of mass-market visual media, roleplaying stands as one of the few surviving forms of oral storytelling, an art as old as mankinds itself. The roleplaying group even resembles the traditional image of the storyteller and his listeners. However, roleplaying extends storytelling beyond the teller/listener dichotomy by involving all the participants in the process of creating the story. Since roleplaying has usually been thought of as a gaming experience, its potential as a storytelling form has never been explored in a major game product... until the publication of *Ars Magica*.

Ars Magica is a roleplaying game of the magical world of Medieval Europe. Unlike other games of this genre, however, *Ars Magica* focuses not on the swordbearers, but on the magicians. Even then, the magicians of this game are not the fireball-throwing "artillery" we're familiar with, rather, they are scholars in pursuit of universal truth, more at home in a library or laboratory than in a dungeon. This makes *Ars Magica* the first game to treat magicians in an accurate and realistic historical manner.

Everything about this game sets it apart from other medieval roleplaying fare. Even the terminology used emphasizes the storytelling philosophy behind it's adventures are "stories," campaigns are "sagas," the gamemaster is the "storyguide." A party of adventurers is called a "troupe," implying a theatrical ensemble. Because magi of this time are wont to avoid adventuring, other types of characters can be played. "Companions" are highly skilled apprentices who are able to use some magic, while "grogs" are the sword-wielding protectors of the magician's of the magi. Players are allowed and encouraged to play more than one type of character so that they can freely shift their emphasis from magical research in the laboratory to exciting adventure in the field.

The game system is simple yet flexible enough to accomodate the diverse actions of characters. Every roll to succeed is made on a 10-sided die. The roll must be equal to or higher than the task's "Ease Factor", a general target number reflecting the difficulty of the task to be performed (usually 6, rarely higher than 9). The die is modified by a characteristic and an ability applicable to the situation. Characteristics and abilities range from -5 (completely inept) to +5 (master), with 0 being average. Thus, all actions in *Ars Magica*, from swinging a sword to casting a spell to enchanting an item are resolved by comparing a modified die roll to the Ease Factor of the action being performed. One interesting twist to these rules is the "stress die". When a situation is particularly stressful, or when there is a great chance of extreme success or failure, the action is resolved normally except that if a natural 0 is rolled, the character is considered to have botched. The die is rolled again, and each subsequent 0 rolled increases the severity of the botch (the effects of which are interpreted by the devious storyguide). Likewise, if a natural 1 is rolled on a stress die, the die is rerolled and the results are doubled, with subsequent 1's redoubling ad infinitum (the authors state that the highest ever achieved in this manner was 129!). The higher the final total, the greater the degree of success. A character generation system should provide more than a bunch of stats and numbers. It should flesh out a charcter as real as any in history or fiction. Ars Magica's unique and appealing character creation system does this better than most games I've seen. The character's eight characteristics are grouped into four similar pairs: Intelligence and Perception, Strength and Stmaina, Presence and Communication, and Dexterity and Quickness. As mentioned above, each characteristic is rated from -5 to +5. When generationg characteristics, the palyer rolls once for each pair. Another player also rolls and the die is subtracted, yielding a total for each pair from -10 to +10. This total is then divided up between the two characteristics in that pair. The player is encouraged to describe each characteristic's value verbally as an aid to storytelling.

The player then chooses a set of flaws and virtues for his character, which also range from -5 (extreme flaw) to +5 (extreme virtue). The flaws and virtues must balance out, i.e. total zero exactly. These will affect certain situations by modifying die rolls the same way that characteristics and abilities do. The list of flaws and virtues is extensive and inspiring, with some real interesting ones like Charmed Life (+4) and Demon Plagued (-4). Special flaws and virtues are provided for mages, like Inventive Genius and Wild Magic. Characters are further developed by way of Confidence points, personality traits, and reputation levels. Confidence points can be "spent" to increases a character's chance of success. Reputation levels are usually acquired during play and will affect future rolls when intereacting with others.

Abilities are also obtained with points, the number of which depends on your age and character type, with companions usually getting the most. As mentioned above, abilities are used to modify die rolls, and many optional variations are provided for experimentation, such as Multipliers, which double or halve abilities depending on their importance. The list of abilities seems small at first, but this is before considering magic arts and weapon skills, which in the end are the most important and often used abilities.

The combat system is simple and direct, and does not allow for detailed tactical play. Attack rolls (Dexterity, plus weapon skills, plus the weapon's bonus) are compared to defense rolls to determine if a hit is scored. Damage is a die roll plus a weapon modifier, compared to the target's "Soak" roll, which represents size and armor protection. There is a lot of die rolling, but it goes fairly smoothly. The fun comes when botches occur, and there is a comprehensive list of sample combat botches to keep things entertaining.

As you might expect, the strength of *Ars Magica* is in its magic system. What makes this magic system especially unique is that magicians are not limited solely by the spells they know. Spells can be impro-

vised on the spot, encouraging creative play. This is accomplished in the way *Ars Magica* spells are set up. Magic is divided into five techniques (methods of magic) and ten forms (substances on which the magic acts). The techniques and forms have been given Latin terms to add to the atmosphere of the game, e.g. the techniques Intellego is "I create" and the form Corporem is "body". The techniques and forms are combined to provide a total of fifty magical arts.

When a magus studies magical abilities, he studies individual techniques and form. When casting spells, he is free to combine the techniques and forms he knows. This greatly enhances a magician's abilities to adapt his knowledge to a given situation. In most games, knowledge of a finite number of spells or "colleges" limits a magician's power to specific circumstances which may never come up in play.

Casting a spell is a simple matter of adding your ability in a technique and a form to a die roll. When casting a specific spell, the roll must be equal to or higher than the spell's level to succeed. An improvised or "spontaneous" spell is cast the same way, but its "level" is determined by your skill in the applicable technique and form, and by the amount of fatigue you expend in the attempt. Several techniques and forms may be applicable to a spell, in which case, the lowest ability is always used. There are many variations and permutations in spellcasting, such as Fastcast, casting from a text, etc. Each type has its own roll modifiers which are summarized on a table. Despite the myriad of possibilities, once a feel for the system is attained, magic proceeds quite smoothly.

One glance at the spell list will tell you that these are not generic "fireball/lightning bolt" spells. Sporting such expresive names like "Cleanse the Veminous Infestation" and "Weight of a Thousand Hells," these spells appear to be derived from actual medieval grimoires (it is not clear whether they are or not). It should be emphasized that this is not "throwaway" magic - most of these spells have long-term results that could effectively change the course of a campaign. Players who are used to quick-and-dirty spellcasting of other games will have to adapt to a new mindset when playing *Ars Magica*.

Because of the difficult nature of spellcasting and spell learning, most magus characters will spend much of their time in magical research. The Laboratory chapter provides rules for studying and learning spells, extracting pure magical energy (vis, Latin for "life"), enchanting items, mixing potions, inventing longevity elixirs (very important!), and creating familiars. Naturally , all of these pursuits require time and a die roll with appropriate modifiers. Magical item creation requires following a lengthy recipe and obtaining necessary items. Laboratory work is complex, but it pays off in realism and also provides good ideas for adventures, as your magus characters send companions and grogs after obscure materials in dangerous locations.

Ars Magica excels not only in its treatment of magic, but also in its portrayal of the medieval world, beginning with the bestiary. The game is clearly not oriented toward monster-bashing; consequently, the choice of beasts are restricted to the intelligent and the magical. Demons, dragons, giants, and other fantastic creatures are generally described, and specific examples are provided, illustrating the concept that each creature in a campaign should be given unique consideration. Excellent material is provided on faeries, a very real folk to the people of the Middle Ages. Faeries are extremely magical creatures comprising everything from sprites to goblins to brownies. They are protrayed as the chaotic, unpredictable side of an otherwise ordered world.

The Saga chapter provides a complete campaign background for *Ars Magica*. Wizards of this time are loosely organized into a secret society called the Order of Hermes. The central unit within the Order is the convenant, a small community of magi, companions, and grogs. The Order has codes of conduct which prevent abuses of power and resolves conflicts between rival convenants. The overview of the medieval world has been expanded from the first edition into a complete campaign area, with sidebars expounding on various elements of medieval society. Two covenants in the south of France, along with surrounding baronies, vilages, monasteries, and magical areas are provided. This setting can be used as is or as a template for your own covenant and surrounding area.

The rules end with guidelines on storytelling. The players are provided with advice on running each of the hiree character types and how their abilities should compliment each other. There is a lot of good material on being a storyguide: developing a background, creating adventures, creating non-player characters and developing magical items. While no introductory adventure is provided, this chapter contains numerous adventure "seeds" based on ten different types of ideas (travel, war, exploration, etc.). The tone of this whole chapter is that rules are secondary to thte primary goal of creating an interesting story.

There are many other features to the game that this brief review can only gloss over. There is material on places of power - magical, divine, infernal, and faerie, and how they interact. There are rules for resolving a "certamen" or wizard's battle, the accepted way for settling disputes within the Order. There is also the running story of apprentice-magus Lucienne, chapters of which preclude each rules section.

In the end, *Ars Magica* is a superb roleplaying game, one that furthers the gaming art in a positive direction. The game mechanics are easily played out and never get in the way of the story (which was obviously one of the designers' objectives). The realistic magic rules are refreshing, and the innovative approach to troupe-style play can be very rewarding. However, there are a number of things to keep in mind before deciding to play it. First, the game is oriented toward campaign play, since many of the adventures exist to further a long-term goal. Second, the medieval setting may seem passe to many, but remember that this is a realistic, historical setting, not just generic knights and castles. Third, and most importantly, *Ars Magica* transcends the limitations of many roleplaying games in its pursuit of the story. Players must learn to sacrifice the self-oriented quest for rewards and experience and work towards the good of the group and the story being told. Once some of this old roleplaying "luggage" is cast off, I imagine that everyone will find something to enjoy about this game.

Ars Magica
Second Edition
Published by Lion Rampant
PO Box 621
Northfield, MN 55057
Designers: Jonathan Tweet & Mark Rein-Hagen
160 pp.
Price: $14.95 ■

Hero HOTline

*This issue, **Hero HOTline** previews just one upcoming products from **Hero Games** — the fourth edition of **Champions**.*

Champions, 4th edition

Published by: Hero Games/ I.C.E.
Designed by: George Macdonald, Steve Peterson and Rob Bell
Art by: George Pèrez, Pat Zircher, Denis Loubet, Glenn Thain and the usual suspects
Price: $ 28.00
Graphics Quality: Fair to Excellent
Reviewed by: David Rogers

The world's best superhero roleplaying game just got bigger.

The Game

Bigger doesn't always mean better, and with most games it just means more complicated and harder to play, without being any more fun to play. **Champions** 4th edition is certainly more complicated than any previous edition of **Champions** and more difficult for a beginner to master. Does that make it a bad game? Probably not. **Champions** isn't just bigger, it's also more comprehensive, including as it does all of the rules and options from every **Hero** game (minus a few rules that have been thrown out, and with a few additions).

The gamebook runs a staggering 352 pages — a long book by any standards, and a monster of a role playing game. Its sheer volume would be enough to discourage most novices from even picking up the game. If that weren't enough to discourage them, then perhaps the three pages of a table of contents might. These novices would be justifiably put off. Despite the fact that the game is well thought out and clearly presented, it is a monster. For the experienced role-player, it provides a challenge, but hardly the sort of overwhelming complexity of Chivalry and Sorcery or the internal inconsistency of Dungeons and Dragons. For the beginner, though, it very nearly qualifies as a nightmare.

The aim of this edition of **Champions**, like all those before it, is clearly to simulate the improbable adventures of adventure fiction and the impossible adventures of superheroes. Unlike previous editions, this version is set up to encompass all genres of adventure fiction, at least in the rules. The sourcebook focuses entirely on superheroics, as does the campaign book, for the most part, though the **Mob Rule** adventure included is easily adaptable to a modern secret agent/police genre. The rules, and the source and campaign books, succeed in conveying the superheroic genre far better than ever before. The sourcebook includes reprints of the best articles on the genre from *The Adventurers' Club* magazine and other **Champions** supplements, as well as some original material, all of which can help even experienced role-players fit into the genre.

The character creation system in **Champions** remains essentially the same as it has been in previous editions of the game — players select the powers, characteristics and disadvantages of their characters without dice, using a point-cost system for abilities and characteristics, which are paid for in part by character disadvantages. This fourth edition of **Champions** has added perks and talents (from **Danger International** and **Justice Incorporated** respectively), which help to make the game system more flexible. These additions allow the players to create a broader range of characters. On the down side, this adds complexity to the game that makes it more difficult for beginning Referees. Beginning players, though, can simply ignore these rules when creating their first characters, and either use them with later characters or add them to their original characters when they become more familiar with the rules.

In addition to perks and talents, this fourth edition of **Champions** adds all the disadvantages that had been spread out over the game system (in **Robot Warriors**, **Justice Inc.**, **Fantasy Hero** and **DI**). It adjusts the point values of powers and disadvantages and adds almost a dozen new powers (including three from **Fantasy Hero**). On top of that the new **Champions** has brought together all of the power advantages from all of the **Hero System** games and has added a half dozen brand new advantages. Likewise, all the **Hero System** power limitations are included, as well as a couple new limitations.

The net effect of all this addition of powers, talents, perks, advantages, limitations, and disadvantages is that it is now possible to simulate nearly every character, power, trait, device, spell or vehicle in real life or in any kind of fiction within a consistent, balanced game system. The price of all this flexibility and completeness (aside from the $28.00) is time and complexity. I must point out, though, that a GM can fairly easily run the game without memorizing all its arcane details.

The Changes

For those who have played **Champions** in one of its first three editions, I must point out what significant changes have been made and how they change the game.

As I have already mentioned, character creation is very similar to what it was before. The greatest changes come in disadvantages (which no longer have halved and quartered point-values for third and subsequent, but which now have an absolute limit on point values) and in creation of non-superheroic characters. Aside from that, most of the changes in character creation consist of new powers and abilities, much like **Champions II** and **Champions III**.

Vehicle creation and combat have changed radically. Vehicles now operate much more like characters than they did before, making it easier for players to integrate vehicle creation, movement and combat into the rest of the game. Unfortunately, two "quick-and-easy" methods of vehicle combat resolution that have been included are nearly incomprehensible, while the old "chase movement" rules have been discarded. Vehicles are also more expensive than they were before, but they can be more flexible and they are much easier to construct. In addition, the authors have included a chart with 16 example vehicles (which are, regrettably, without listed point costs).

Character combat is very much like it had been, though the rules for non-combat movement (especially for flight) have changed somewhat. Also, mental combat is based on the defending character's Ego + (multiples of ten) instead of multiples of the defending character's Ego. Additionally, the individual mental powers (particularly Mind Control) are slightly rewritten. Defense against Presence Attacks is now based on Presence or Ego characteristics (whichever is higher) and Multiples of ten, instead of multiples of the Presence characteristic. Martial Arts skills are bought differently than before, and their effects are slightly altered. These are minor, almost cosmetic, changes.

The biggest changes in this edition of **Champions** are probably in the sourcebook and campaign book. The old sourcebook has been almost entirely thrown out

and replaced with the new. Much of the sourcebbok was culled from the best of the articles in the *Adventurer's Club*, though there is a brand new section on **Setting Up The Campaign** that is well-written and helpful even for experienced game-masters.

The campaign book is likewise almost all brand-new. Twelve villains and heroes from the old Champions make a return appearance (updated, naturally, for the new rules). There is also a brand-new six-member Hero-team (**The Champions**) complete with a three-story headquarters, a VTOL jet plane and three miniscenarios. There are 14 brand-new villains as well, for a total of 20 new characters, plus three revised characters in the rulesbook, for a total of 35 characters in all. In addition, there is a brand-new 35-page adventure at the end that is much more sophisticated than the old **Viper's Nest** scenario.

Generally speaking, the fourth edition of **Champions** is fairly compatible with previous Hero products.

Recommendations

If you have never played a role-playing game before, but you are interested in a game that allows you to simulate as many different types of fiction and reality as possible, you should seriously consider this game. It requires a fairly substantial investment of time for at least one person (the gamemaster), but it allows the players more flexibility than any other game system, and it lends itself well to all kinds of adventure.

If you are new to role-playing and just want to role-play super- heroes, well, there are simpler and less expensive games available. These games don't give you the flexibility of **Champions**, but the two best do have the advantage of the familiar characters of the major comic book companies. These simpler games will make it possible to play what you want to play more cheaply and easily than **Champions**. But **Champions** is better in the long run.

If you are familiar with role-playing games already, then **Champions** will probably be fairly simple for you to master. There is no better superhero role-playing game, and if that's what you want, this is what you should buy!

The person for whom it is hardest for me to make a recommendation is the person who has bought and played **Champions** in the past. If you have already invested money in the early editions of **Champions**, then fourth edition Champions probably still has enough for you to justify spending $28.00. It's nice. It has a beautiful hard cover and new adventures, villains and heroes, (as many as in two regular adventures) but there aren't enough changes to make it a must buy product. Nonetheless, even if you have all the **Hero Games** products ever printed, it still has something new to offer. Now, it's the only role-playing game you'll ever need.

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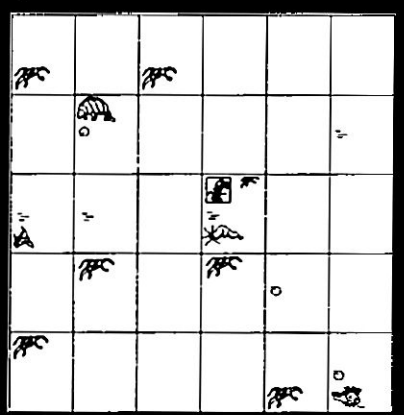

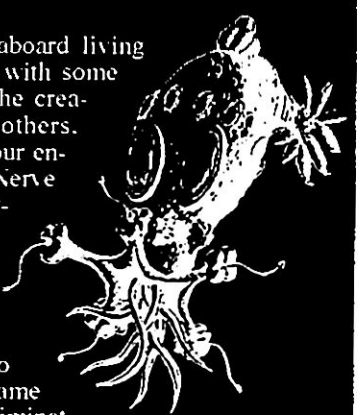

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An interview with
Rob Bell
of Hero Games

By David Rogers

Rob Bell is a co-author of the hardcover fourth edition of Champions and editor-in-chief of the entire Hero Games line.

Rob Bell graduated from the University of Virginia in 1988. He had started work for ICE/Hero Games in the summer of 1987, as a junior at UVa. He worked at first in production at ICE, but moved to Hero when it became clear that he knew the system better than anyone else at ICE. He had written the well-received but troubled ***Wings of the Valkyrie*** *in the summer of 1986, which was released as a supplement in the summer of 1987.* ***Wings****, which tells the story of a group of time-travellers out to assassinate Adolf Hitler in 1933, was controversial and offended enough distributors that it was pulled from the shelves almost immediately and few consumers ever saw it. Fortunately for Hero Games, Rob was only a little bit discouraged.*

Over the fall and spring of 1987 and 1988, when Rob was working one day a week and finishing college, Hero managed to put out half a dozen products. When he graduated, Rob went to work full-time for the Hero line, where he's been for more than a year now as series editor. In that time, Hero has put out 12 releases including ***Star Hero*** *and the new* ***Champions*** *revision. In this interview, Rob tells readers of* ***SpaceGamer*** *what they can expect from the new* ***Champions****.*

SpaceGamer: In preparing for this interview, I went over all four editions of Champions and noticed that the biggest difference among them lay in art and production values. What is there in the new hard-cover Champions besides better art and fewer typos?

Rob Bell: Well, this is really the first, or this is legitamately the first real revision the Hero system's undergone since '79. The early revisions, like you said, mostly added better production and new graphics. This actually is a thorough looking at every power, looking at every skill and saying "Is this the best way we can do this? Is this how we really want it to work?" And taking it from there, this honestly was an attempt to go back to its roots as a system and say "Is this the best we can possibly do?" And we think that the hardcover is.

SpaceGamer: Why hard cover Champions?

Rob Bell: Our goal was to put all the rules under one roof and we had to do that with a hard cover. Before that decision was made we started looking at length. You and I have both seen how books, particularly Champions books, that get a lot of use can fall apart. We've talked to people that have had to buy more than one Champions book because they've fallen apart. And our option at that point was to put it all under one hard cover. We thought, given the size of the book, which we estimated then would be 250 to 300 pages, that would be the only way the book could be put together. There are books out there right now with a similar page count or even less, which fall apart because they're not hard-cover. We didn't want that to happen with Champions.

SpaceGamer: Why did you decide to go ahead and make a fourth revision of Champions?

Rob Bell: Well, I'm glad you asked that. You're not the first person to ask that. There are three main reasons to make a sweeping Hero Revision in addition to marketing reasons (we wanted to upgrade the trade dress). As far back as when I first came on in 1987 I started talking about this, and when I came on full-time I pressed (for the revision), and talked with George and Steve about it and they agreed it would be a good idea.

The first would be consistency. Over the years since the first Hero book was published, books have come out that haven't been 100% consistent with what has gone before them.

SpaceGamer: Which Books would those be?

Rob Bell: Well, that depends on what you seen as the basis of the Hero System. Justice Incorporated wasn't quite like Champions. Fantasy Hero magic wasn't quite like Champions powers or Justice Inc. talents. Danger International had slightly different skills than the other games. That and there were rules which were unique to the individual games but were none the less appropriate to the rest of the system. For example, if you wanted the "Rivalry" disadvantage, you had to buy Robot Warriors, if you wanted "Prejudice", you had to buy Star Hero. One of our goals was to bring all the rules under one book to make sure that the customers wouldn't have to buy every single book we put out. Second, to be consistent, because that had always been part of the Hero plan — to make the rules from one game to another consistent.

SpaceGamer: From the time Justice Incorporated was published or before then?

Rob Bell: As far back as Champions, they had been playtesting a game called Spy Hero, which eventually was going to come out in the form of Danger International. Now over the years, they did not have a chance to sit down and say, how do we most want to do something? Why do we want to handle this? How do we really want to do magic and gadgets? So, each book came out a little bit different. Now what the revision gives us is the chance to take it from scratch, take a look at it. This is how we want to handle, for example, weapons. This is how we want to handle, lets say, magic. The upshot was that we were able to take it apart, go back to basics and rework it instead of just saying that looks okay. So that's the consistency angle. The second is the flexibility angle. We realized, especially with regards to Robot Warriors and Star Hero, that to publish a new game, on a new genre we had to reprint a good 60% of the rules. To be sure, there were slight changes among them. The rules were altered a little bit, the names were changed. You ended up with Oratory in one, Courtier in another, I forget which. In any case, the upshot was that you had to reprint the vast majority of the rules in order to do any new book and we thought that if we put a single unified set of rules in one place, we could publish smaller sets of rules for smaller subgenres. For instance, we now have someone working on a martial arts supplement.

The object is that now that we have the rules in one place, an author that wants to write a genre book doesn't have to, as they did for Star Hero and Robot Warriors, re-do all the rules in one place — they can just refer to the unified set, and say, 'use these powers and these skills, don't allow this talent or this perk.'

The final reason is quality. We've had ten years to playtest this since the first Champions game came out, and

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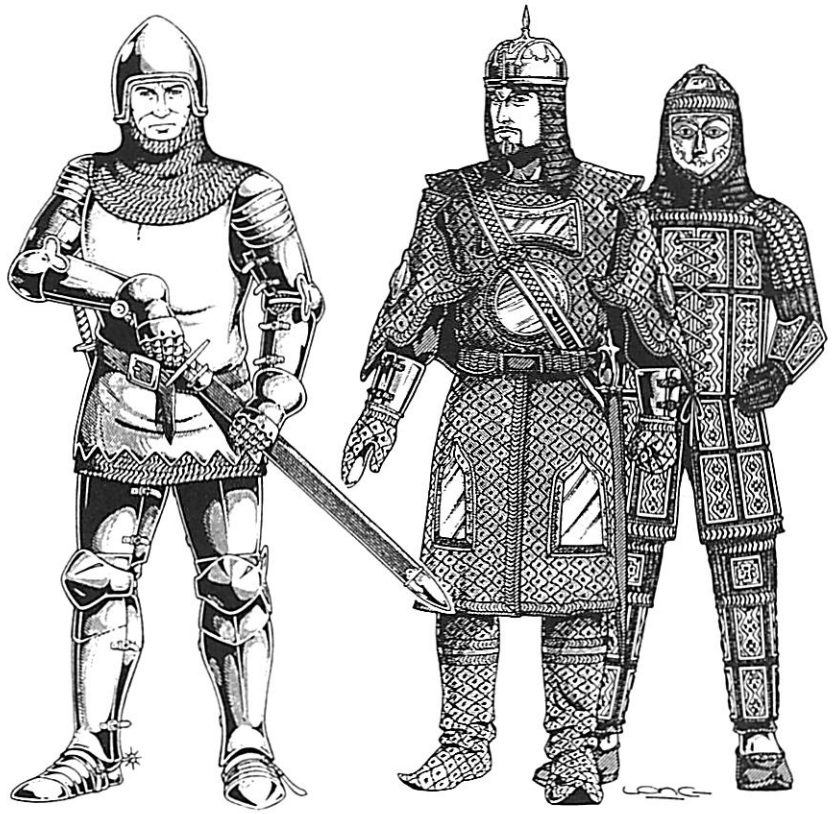

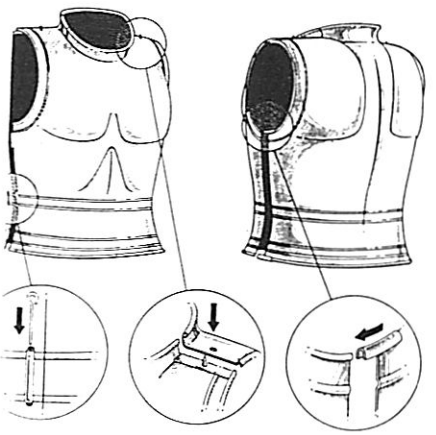

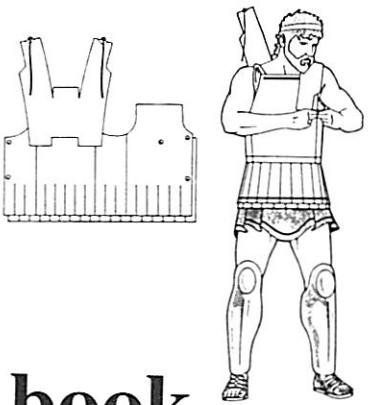

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quite frankly we've had a chance to see that some things work better than the others. We've had hundreds, if not thousands, of letters of feedback, and we had a chance to do it right. Some things were hurried over the years, because of deadlines and so forth — we're now able to go back to them and say — 'Is this is the way we really want to do something?' As as a result, we've now got a cleaner, more streamlined set of rules.

Right now is the earliest that the resources were available. That's where I came in. I was hired, at least in part, because I had this plan for the revision which was acceptable to George and Steve. The reason we're doing it now is, of course, because we wanted to get it out as soon as possible. Once the rules were in shape and the revision work was done, we wanted to publish it. And Gen-Con 1989 was chosen last fall as a good target date for the release.

SpaceGamer: Is that when it's coming out?

Rob Bell: At this point, I'm guardedly optimistic.

SpaceGamer: Who is the target audience for fourth edition Champions?

Rob Bell: The target audience has two parts: first and foremost are the people who already play Champions. There are more than 80,000 people who bought the game. If half of those buy the new set, this will be an unqualified success. So that's the first part. The second part are people, of course, who never played Hero Games before for whatever reason. Perhaps the cover didn't appeal to them, perhaps the rules seemed too obtuse, perhaps the fact that you had to buy three Champions books threw them off. Now that its all in one place, we're hoping that these people will give Hero a try. The third audience are people who've never role-played before. By cleaning up the rules, by putting it under a snazzy new cover, by making it hard-cover, we're hoping to make it more accessible to people who haven't played role-playing before. We're hoping these people, maybe people who read comic books, will pick up the game and give it a shot.

SpaceGamer: Would you say that fourth edition Champions would be a good game for beginners?

Rob Bell: Hmmm... Given a single target, our target is obviously people in the role-playing industry first. Hero Games has a lot of flexibility — as a result it comes off as reasonably complicated. The goal, therefore, was to aim it at people who've played the game before, first. Aiming it at the beginner was a secondary consideration.

SpaceGamer: How long would you say it would take to learn fourth edition Champions if you didn't know anything about role-playing games and how long do you think it would take to learn if you knew something about it?

Rob Bell: Oh, gosh. We have a number of start-up aids including a set of heroes so that you can play without learning the character creation system. We have a quick-sheet, which, if you handed that out to all your players, would be all they would need to play. Of course, the gamemaster would probably want to know the rules fairly well. The start-up time would be to read the whole book through and probably run through a sample combat — an afternoon or an evening would probably suffice to get a working knowledge of the game.

SpaceGamer: If I were a person who were new to role-playing games or to Champions, or I were a person who had played third edition Champions, why would you say I should buy this game?

Rob Bell: Well, that really is a two-part question. What I would say to people who have not played Hero games before is that the Hero system offers an unparralelled opportunity to design characters just the way you want them to be. The character point system (which is the way the Hero system designs characters) allows you to build characters from scratch. It assumes nothing. You can be effectively, as strong as you want to be, as smart as you want to be (and) have whatever skills you choose. If you want more points you buy disadvantages and that gives you additional points to work with. Now, as for someone who has played Hero games before: the new rules are much cleaner, much easier to use and more consistent. Additionally, the new book has more powers, more skills, more talents and more 'Disadvantages' in addition to just cleaning up what has already come before now. In addition, we've also added things that we feel had been left out in earlier rulebooks.

SpaceGamer: What would you say is the main thing that's different in new Champions as opposed to old Champions?

Rob Bell: Well, of all the games, Champions would be the one that is least changed. If there had to be a single thing (and I'm going to get into game mechanics here), it would be the way 'Disadvantages' are handled. Since Champions was originally created, the emphasis on 'Disadvantages' has changed away from being just a "disadvantage," something that's bad, and more and more towards something which is more a character trait, something that's indicative of what the character's like.

SpaceGamer: A role-playing opportunity?

Rob Bell: That's right. The new way that disadvantages are handled, we beleive, makes it much more an integral part of the character, much less a way to just get points, which is something we want to avoid.

SpaceGamer: How is this game different from the Marvel or DC superhero role-playing games?

Rob Bell: Well, there's a couple of aspects. First off, of course, it isn't licensed, it isn't tied to an already set-up comic-book environment. This allows people (players and gamemasters) to set up the heroes just as they would like them to be rather than feeling obliged to run it in an already set-up environment. This doesn't mean that they can't, for instance, set up a DC campaign or a Marvel campaign if they want to. It just means that they have greater flexibility to run outside of those campaign environments. Other than that, we feel that the character creation system, by allowing the players to create any character they choose gives them a wider breadth of options when it comes to characters they play.

SpaceGamer: How many people worked on the new Champions?

Rob Bell: The new Champions, the latest revision, had a tremendous number of people working on it, mostly in an unpaid capacity as playtesters, editors, and writers. We've had most of the people who've contributed to Hero Games in the past do some playtesting. In addition, we had a number of industry professionals like Allen Varney and Aaron Allston putting in long hours to help us make this as good as it could be.

SpaceGamer: How was this done? What was the process for putting together the new Champions?

Rob Bell: The way it worked — as it actually turned out, it went through six playtest groups in all, with the final two being mostly in-house — the way we

handled it was we sent out a general letter early last fall asking asking people what they thought was wrong with the system or what they thought could be improved (the final group ended up at about 200 playtesters). All the feedback came back to me. I compiled a list and I went to George. George and I looked over their list, added comments of our own and tried to come up with solutions to their problems. At that point, we sent our solutions back out to these people, and they fiddled with them. Some of our solutions, they felt were good solutions and some of them they felt were lousy ones. In addition, they'd discovered new problems with the rules. This came back to us and George and I worked out solutions; then sent it back to them. We'd gone through this loop four times, at which point we brought it in-house and there were several in-house groups which were working on making sure that the rules were as polished as they could be.

SpaceGamer: How compatible is this new Champions going to be with old Champions, Fantasy Hero, Justice Incorporated and Danger International material?

Rob Bell: Well, if you don't worry about point costs — and of course point costs are not necessary for actually running Champions except for character creation — they should be almost completely compatible. What the new Champions has done is allowed characters a whole lot of new options, but the old characters simply don't take advantage of these new options. However, if you're worried about point costs — in other words if you're trying to see how many points a character is based on, then the change will be a little bit more dramatic. For example, Fantasy Hero characters and other characters in what we call non-superheroic games, will be receiving more points for disadvantages and as such; if the GM wanted to convert them directly over, they would receive less disadvantages.

SpaceGamer: Will you be reprinting any of the old Champions, Fantasy Hero or Danger International material with these changes?

Rob Bell: Its a matter for some debate right now. Obviously it'll be based on how many Champions players are interested in seeing the manuscripts with revised stats and so forth. We will definitely be coming out with a revised Enemies book, hopefully to follow closely on the heels of the hardcover, either in October or November. The other books will be according, like I said, to how much demand there is for them.

SpaceGamer: You said that most of the characters and the acdventures of the old Hero material will be compatible with the new Hero material. What about things like the Spell Book and the Gadgets Book? Are they now obsolete?

Rob Bell: The Spell Book and Gadgets book will not be as useful from a numbers standpoint, no. Characters who are looking to get the costs correct, because of the costs change will no longer be able to. They can still be used as sourcebooks and as ideas. Of all the books in the old Hero System, those two will be the most obsolete.

SpaceGamer: Is The Spell Book going to be re-released then? Or another version of The Spell Book?

Rob Bell: Another version of the Spell Book is definitely on the way. We're hoping to put several hundred spells in the new Fantasy Hero and in addition to that we also want to do another Spell Book to help people out.

SpaceGamer: What's next with Hero and

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when is it coming out?

Rob Bell: Well, the Champions is coming out at Gen-Con. That will be followed by a steady stream of short adventures, the kind that everyone has seen before, the 32-pagers. The next big product will be the Enemies book. Hopefully that'll be coming out by mid-October.

SpaceGamer: How big will that be?

Rob Bell: We're looking at a 96-page perfect bound. And it will have a select group of the best enemies, a sort of select group, from the books we now call Enemies One, Two and Three.

SpaceGamer: What about Four and Five (The International File and Villainy Unbound)?

Rob Bell: At this point, we're looking at printing them seperately by themselves.

SpaceGamer: Revised?

Rob Bell: That's correct. Both of them are doing quite well.

SpaceGamer: And what is the Christmas Champions release?

Rob Bell: Its working title is "Mystic Masters," and it'll be a 96-page book detailing the use of sorcery and magic in a Champions campaign. Its written by Allen Varney.

SpaceGamer: I understand that there is going to be a generic Hero System book coming out?

Rob Bell: Absolutely. Once we have our first genre book, which will most likely be Fantasy Hero, that will be released concurrently with what we're calling The Hero System Rules Book. This rules book will simply be the rules. It'll be genre non-specific and will have the rules neccessary to play in any role-playing campaign.

SpaceGamer: And when is that coming out?

Rob Bell: Probably around Christmas time. Now, of course, people who want to get that ahead of time can buy the Champions book.

SpaceGamer: And Hero Games is going to put out a series of small, genre-specific books after that, is that correct?

Rob Bell: The two first books will be Fantasy Hero and Star Hero. Those will both probably run for a full 160 pages. But after that we're looking at medium-sized genre books like the martial arts book, or we'll do small ones. If someone can come up with a small genre book that uses the Hero System it can now be published because we will have The Hero System Rules Book which has all the rules in it.

SpaceGamer: Tell us about the Martial Arts supplement.

Rob Bell: Ninja Hero is its working title. It's authored by Aaron Allston and we're looking at the spring of '90. This is of course very tentative.

After (the revision is released), we'll see what other major projects I can work on. Those major products that I can see right now include a Mature Champions which now is only in the drawing stages.

SpaceGamer: What do you mean by that?

Rob Bell: Mature Champions would be a book that would aim at a more mature audience — the people who read graphic novels, the people who thought (Frank Miller's Batman series) Dark Knight was the best comic book ever published. It would be grittier, less four-color, less good guy — bad guy and more adult.

SpaceGamer: And would it aim for a sort of Watchman sort of feel and would you try to have that out in time for the movie in 1990?

Rob Bell: Yes.

The other big project that we're working on would be a basic Champions, which would be a less expensive book. We're looking at the $15-$20 range (The 335 page hard-cover will be $28.00).

SpaceGamer: A less expensive, less complicated book? Something aimed more at beginners?

Rob Bell: Something aimed right at beginners. The things you could do would be to take out character creation, to give them characters and to simplify the combat somewhat, so that people could play the Champions game. And, of course, if they wanted the rest of the game, they could buy the hardcover. But that's also long-range.

SpaceGamer: For years, Champions survived with little or no support in terms of adventures and sourcebooks. For a year now, you've released an average of one supplement every month. Are you afraid you might overload your market with all these releases?

Rob Bell: Well, given the increased disposable income that people seem to have and the fact that we sell our products for under the standard market price — we sell ours for $6.00 — I'm not really concerned that we can glut it. Most people seem to have $6.00 a month that they can spend on Hero Games products.

SpaceGamer: The cover for hard-cover Champions is by George Pèrez. Are paintings by Mr. Pèrez and others going to grace the covers of future Hero Games products?

Rob Bell: That is correct. Because of the ground-breaking work we did to get this cover, we are now in contact with artists like Todd MacFarlane, Arthur Adams, Paul Smith — a lot of the people that are dong top-flight work in comic books right now. And for example, the Enemies book will likely be done by Todd MacFarlane or George Pèrez. (For) the Christmas Champions release we're looking at a cover by Arthur Adams.

SpaceGamer: In the past, Hero games art has been charitably described as amateurish. Now that your cover art has improved, what are you doing about your interior art?

Rob Bell: Well, we have, as time has passed, assembled a better and better stable of artists. We've also found people like Pat Zircher and Glen Johnson, who we'd lost contact with. But, of course, continuing to improve interior art is a priority.

SpaceGamer: Sounds Good. Do you have any final comments for the interview?

Rob Bell: Well, just that I hope that the hard-cover product turns out as well as we all intend and that its ready by Gen-Con. ■

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However, these raiders have a weak link — they need to be supplied. Their forward base at Dunkelheim has to be eliminated and Admiral Borodin has put the Americans to the task.

Operation Overlord is the American Marine assault on the Kafer citadel based at Dunkelheim. The adventure follows a group of American Marines from their interface assault landing through a mission which takes them into the heart of the Kafer *"Ch*!!"*

This book contains information on the colony world of Dunkelheim and the citadel which serves as the Kafer "Safe Place." This book also contains extensive information about the American Marines, their equipment, and their organization.

A modified skills list is even included for characters who enter the career path of the Corps. Finally, a brief update on the Kafer War is provided, describing the disposition of naval forces and of the American Marines following the completion of the adventure.

Operation Overlord serves as more than just an adventure. Its completion leaves plenty of room for further adventures, allowing directors to easily stage a campaign against the Kafers on post-invasion Dunkelheim.

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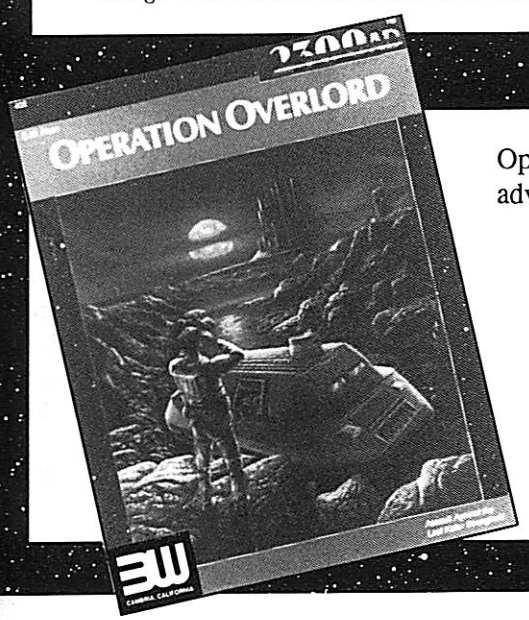

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Mind Games

The PSI sourcebook from Hero Games

Scott Heine, who brought us all last year's **To Serve and Protect** (reviewed first in this very column!) is back with more devilishly diabolical bad guys — the sinister Parapsychological Studies Institute. The PSI was first made reference to back in Enemies One. Since then, the Institute has crept up time and again in half a dozen supplements. But the organization has never been defined and no characters still a part of the group have ever appeared — until now.

Just like last time, Scott has provided his own illustrations for the interior. Last time they were good. This time they are a knockout.

The book is nicely organized, broken down into a substatial history section that includes methods of operation and combat tactics, a detailed campaign use section (including a bibliography), a good deal of equipment and headquarters information, and of couse, the characters and scenarios.

The twenty-two (22!) characters, from all over the world (and beyond) have some of the most unique and believeable personalities in any superheroic comic, game, or supplement. Many of these mind-bogglingly nutso villains are based on real case studies of actual psychopaths, and it shows. The characters have fully developed motivations and have formed a complex web of interpersonal relationships that many hero-groups would be hard-pressed to match, despite the fact that the heroes are role-played week after week.

There are two complete scenarios, four fairly detailed scenario suggestions, and half-dozen one-line scenario ideas. The combination is more than enough to make sure you get your money's worth from the product, even if you never use the thing again after you finish these 12 adventures.

So what are you waiting for? This has all the psychic psupervillains psuperheroes can swallow. Buy it. Its the best from Hero since Strike Force.

D.R.

Solo of Fortune

From R. Talsorian Games

Solo of Fortune is the first in a series of supplements, each highlighting a different Cyberpunk character class. Patterned after a modern magazine with a startlingly similar name, **Solo** is a welcome reprieve from the standard (boring) supplement format. Not only does **Solo** tell you more about this most macho of character classes, it also tells you a lot about their niche in the new world.

The supplement is filled with entertaining reading, both in articles ("Bubba & JT Test the Sternmeyer M-95A2") and advertisements. Various 'subcategories' of Solos are delineated, to enhance role-playing and individualization of characters. Finally, there is a useful rules supplement on vehicles covering handling, detonation, and impact with solid objects. Sadly, we still don't have definitive hit-and-run rules, althgough they'd be easy to generate from the vehicle data.

There are a lot of adventure ideas, but they are skeletal at best and require a major fleshing-out to be used. Editorial glitches run rampant ('ECC' for European Economic Community? Come on!). Suspension of disbelief would seem to be a major consideration when using a magazine format like this and the appearance of game stats in the text tends to blow that right out the window. Perhaps the stats could have been put in a shaded box, in an appendix at the end, or the GM could have been left to wing it. Who would advertise that their armor can absorb "25 SP"?

The supplement is well-written and informative. The illustration are good to excellent. (Where do these guys find their artists?) The graphic presentation is nice, with the notable exception of the cover model, who looks too soft to be a professional mercenary. Sorry, Bubba. Overall, it was danceable and it had a good beat. If your campaign uses Solos or vehicles to any extent, it'll be worth your while.

E.B.

C.L.O.W.N.

The Criminal Legion Of Wacky Non-Conformists from HERO Games

C.L.O.W.N. is an organization book for **Champions** filled with the wackiest supervillains ever to come out of a superhero role-playing game. These guys aren't just crazy — they're wacky. The book is 32 pages of silliness, including no less than fourteen (14!) characters, a supervillain base, a self-aware whimsical automobile, six pages of CLOWN's hilarious history, two full-fledged scenarios and five scenario ideas. The interior's are among Hero's finest, with Pat Zircher doing some of his best work in years. The cover is absolutely extraordinary. Unfortunately, a few of his illustrations seem a bit rushed.

The supplement is well organized and easy to follow, even if you haven't seen any of the previous adventures from **Hero**. Unfortunately, as always, proofreading errors have crept into the final product, but none of the typos are serious or particularly confusing.

So, since this is a comedy adventure supplement, the $64 question is "Is it funny?" It's certainly a joy to read, from the credits on page one to the sell copy on the back cover. Four of the villains just don't pass the giggle test. Still, that leaves ten funny bad guys, from the child-like Tag (don't be "it" if you know what's good for you) to the prankster-inventor Merry Andrews and Tee-Hee the talking car. It's a shame, though, that so much of the comedy of this supplement lies in the background of the villains (candy-striping the St. Louis Arch, turning the Eiffel Tower into an oil derrick) and not in the crimes they commit and the adventure scenarios that involve the player-heroes.

I recommend this book for those **Champions** players who want a change of pace from moral dilemmas, gruesome monsters and world-conquering megalomaniacs. This book is about a group of folks that just want to have fun.

D.R.

Hardwired: The Sourcebook

From R. Talsorian Games

The cyberpunk genre is cetainly at no loss for excellent fiction by imaginative writers, and it was only a matter of time before licensed products started showing up on the RPG market. **Hardwired: The Sourcebook** is the long-awaited Cyberpunk supplement drawn from the **Hardwired** novel. Written primarily by the author, Walter Jon Williams, the supplement provides (among other things) background and adventures based on his novel, thus providing players with an alternate **Cyberpunk** role-playing universe.

Being an avid Williams fan, the extra background was the supplement's selling

point in my eyes. (Why couldn't there have been even more?) I was pleasantly surprised to find that Williams, a game designer himself, had included fumble charts (for those bad days) and a Generic Goon Generator (for those guys who make your day bad) and even some suggested rules modifications. All of these inclusions are thoroughly useful and are bound to get a good workout in anyone's campaign.

On the other hand, the Netrunning section (not written by Williams) did not have the **Hardwired** feel to it. It seemed more like Gibson, to me, although it is still an interesting alternative. The scenarios provided are simple skeletons and require a good fleshing out before they can be used. The graphics are better than expected, but each illustration appears two or three times, sometimes on facing pages. And the book suffers from that plague of all small game companies: the typo. All of these shortcomings have no effect on the playability of the supplement, but they can be annoying.

If you're a **Hardwired** fan, this book is definitely worthwhile; it's a good springboard into **Hardwired** role-playing. And even for those who don't wish to use Williams' universe, the book is a good resource and idea bin. The rules, charts and background are sure to improve your Cyberpunk game. Check it out!

E.B.

Neutral Ground

From HERO Games

Neutral Ground is a 32-page supplement for **Champions**, complete with a club headquarters, history, neighborhood and background, 11 superheroes, 10 normal employees, and an application for membership. The organization and layout are solid, and the artwork is good but hardly inspired. Pat Zircher does not do his best work in this supplement.

Welcome to **Neutral Ground**, a private club for supers — heroes and villains. **Neutral Ground** (aka Sanctuary) is clearly inspired by the exclusive men's clubs of yesteryear (like the Empire Club), where members could gather in safety and quiet, away from the maddenning pace of commerce and society, to relax and discuss issues of mutual concern, or simply to enjoy a good cigar and a fine meal. It's not an Organization, nor is **Neutral Ground** an adventure, though it does include eight short adventure scenarios. Rather, Neutral Ground is more of a place — a book about a continuing campaign element.

The structure of the supplement is logical and easy to follow, and the illustrations are well-placed to highlight the text. The normal NPC characters are well-developed and interesting, as are their superpowerful counterparts. Everything about Sanctuary is well-developed and all my questions are answered in the text — with a single glaring exception.

This supplement has eight adventure scenarios, heavy on character development and detective work, but light on combat. I heartily recommend **Neutral Ground** for **Champions** and **Danger International** players interested in role-playing, soap opera and detective work. If you want an adventure with lots of combat and monster-bashing, though, this one isn't for you.

D.R.

Atlas Unleashed

By HERO Games

Following the **Red Doom** Organizations Book, David Rogers has delivered another ready-to-run package of background, villains, and linked scenarios. His partner in crime is Donny Jansen, who illustrated **Red Doom** and contributed some of the most twisted characters in **Atlas Unleashed**. Together they deliver more than an adventure, perhaps less than a true supplement — a vigorous hybrid, if you will, easily able to spawn a whole campaign.

Meet the demented Peacemonger and his elite squad of supervillains, spawn of the mysterious Q'rrm Effect. Investigate clues connecting the humanitarian agency Prometheus with the worldwide terrorist league Atlas. Visit, and demolish, a lunar laboratory and a deathtrap modeled on Dante's Inferno. And gasp at the gruesomely detailed game effects of a tactical nuclear bomb. The supplement provides GMs with a ready-made origin for new supers, guidelines for introducing its two organizations into existing campaigns, and character descriptions of some intriguing villains.

David's writing continues to improve, though he is not yet what anyone would call a stylist. Still, his learning curve is impressive.

Atlas Unleashed has finally staggered onto the shelves as a peculiar, but attractive and useful, blend of organization write-up and scenario package. Some GMs want more campaign depth, others new locations, still others new thugs for their players to beat up. All should find **Atlas Unleashed** a solid value.

D.R. ■

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DRAGON CON
Box 47696
Atlanta, GA 30362

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October 6-8, 1989
Eric Paperman, Con Director
418 Vliet Blvd
Cohoes, NY 12047

SUNCOAST SKIRMISHES '89
October 6-8. 1989
SKIRMISHES
P O Box 2097
Winter Haven, FL 33883

TOLEDO GAMING CONVENTION
October 7-8, 1989
Mind Games
3001 N. Reynolds Rd
Toledo, OH 43615

QUAD CON 89
October 13-15, 1989
RiverBend Gamers Assoc.
P O Box 8421
Moline, IL 61265

QUEEN CITY GAMES '89
October 20-21, 1989
Cincinnati Adventure Gamers
Q.C.G. 89
P O Box 462
Cincinnati, OH 45201

MILEHICON 21
October 27-29, 1989
"Robots & other Con-Traptions"
MILEHICON 21
P O Box 27074
Lakewood, CO 80227

GAME-A-THON
November 4-5, 1989
Raleigh Hobbies
3265 Austin Peay Hwy
Memphis, TN 38128

UMF-CON
November 11-12, 1989
Table Gaming Club
c/o Student Life Office
Student Center
5 South Street
Farmington, ME 04938

JACKSONVILLE SKIRMISHES '90
February 9-11, 1990
SKIRMISHES
P O BOX 2097
Winter Haven, FL 33883

ORCON '90
February 16-19, 1990
3W
P O Box 8399
Long Beach, CA 90808

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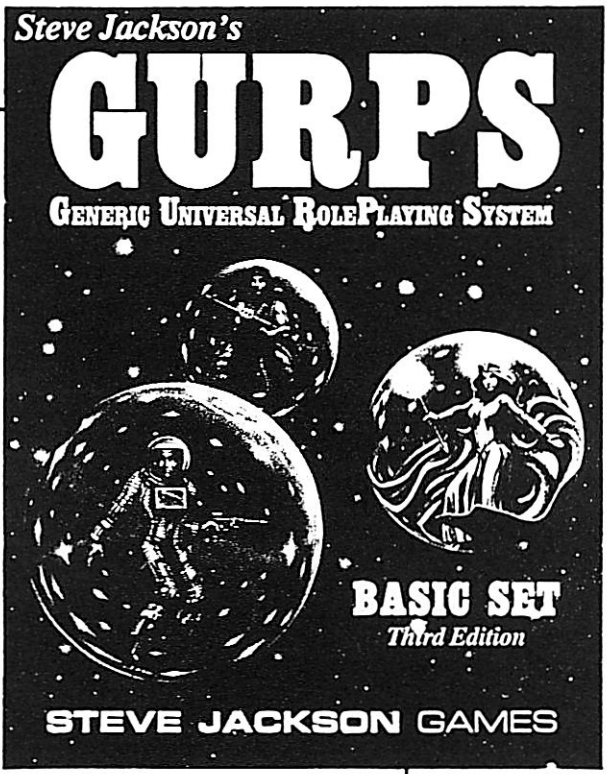

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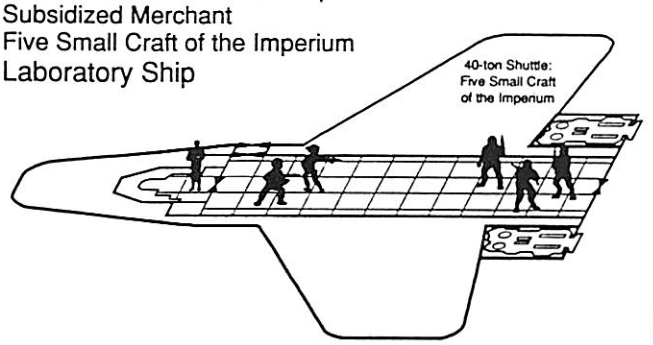

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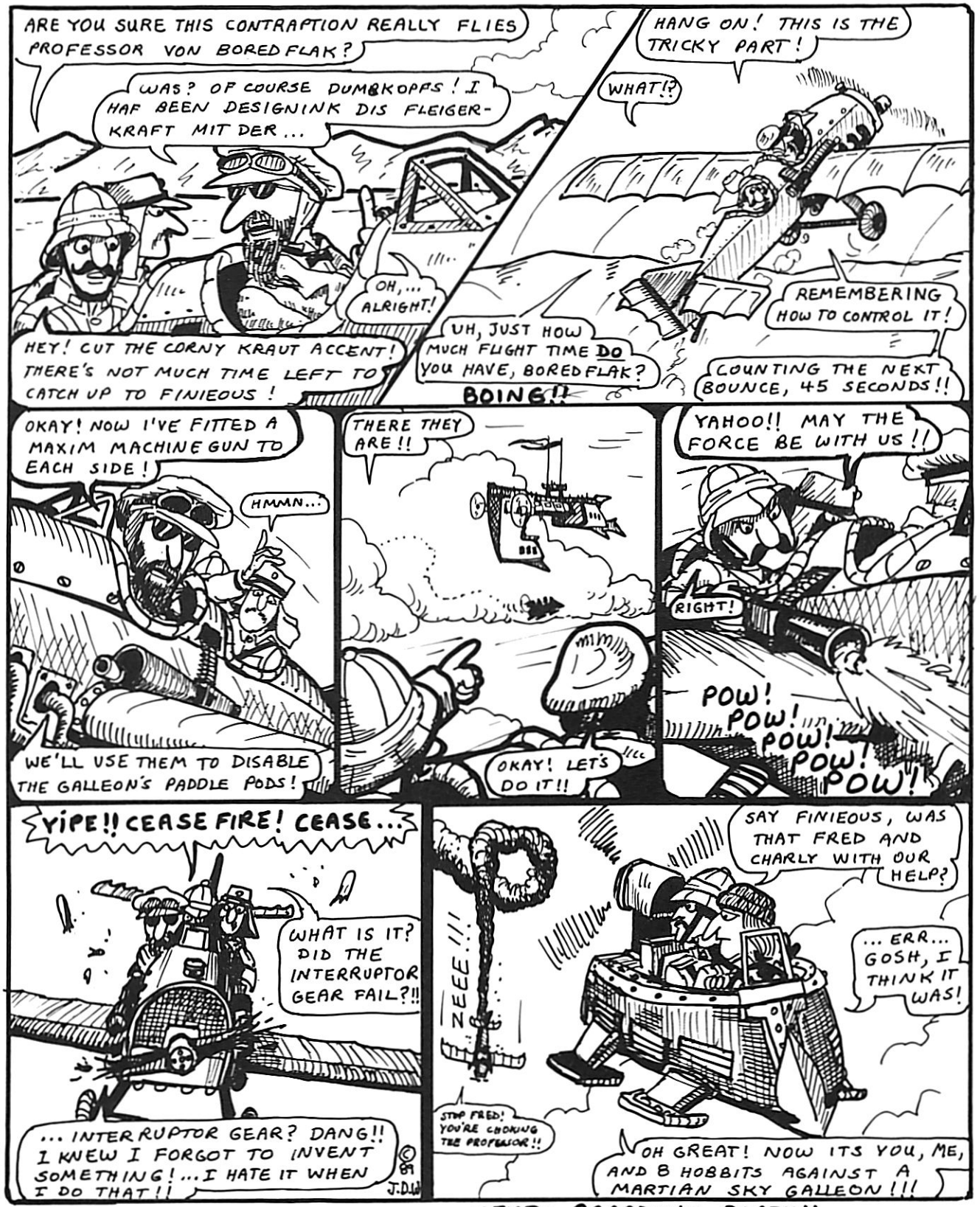
ARE YOU SURE THIS CONTRAPTION REALLY FLIES PROFESSOR VON BOREDFLAK?
WAS? OF COURSE DUM&KOPFS! I HAF BEEN DESIGNINK DIS FLEIGER-KRAFT MIT DER...
OH,... ALRIGHT!
HEY! CUT THE CORNY KRAUT ACCENT! THERE'S NOT MUCH TIME LEFT TO CATCH UP TO FINIEOUS!
HANG ON! THIS IS THE TRICKY PART!
WHAT!?
REMEMBERING HOW TO CONTROL IT!
UH, JUST HOW MUCH FLIGHT TIME DO YOU HAVE, BOREDFLAK?
COUNTING THE NEXT BOUNCE, 45 SECONDS!!
BOING!!
OKAY! NOW I'VE FITTED A MAXIM MACHINE GUN TO EACH SIDE!
HMMN...
WE'LL USE THEM TO DISABLE THE GALLEON'S PADDLE PODS!
THERE THEY ARE!!
OKAY! LET'S DO IT!!
YAHOO!! MAY THE FORCE BE WITH US!!
RIGHT!
POW! POW! POW! POW! POW!
YIPE!! CEASE FIRE! CEASE...
WHAT IS IT? DID THE INTERRUPTOR GEAR FAIL?!!
... INTERRUPTOR GEAR? DANG!! I KNEW I FORGOT TO INVENT SOMETHING!... I HATE IT WHEN I DO THAT!!
© 89 J.D.W.
ZEEE!!!
SAY FINIEOUS, WAS THAT FRED AND CHARLY WITH OUR HELP?
... ERR... GOSH, I THINK IT WAS!
STOP FRED! YOU'RE CHOKING THE PROFESSOR!!
OH GREAT! NOW ITS YOU, ME, AND 8 HOBBITS AGAINST A MARTIAN SKY GALLEON!!!

NEXT: BOARDING PARTY!!

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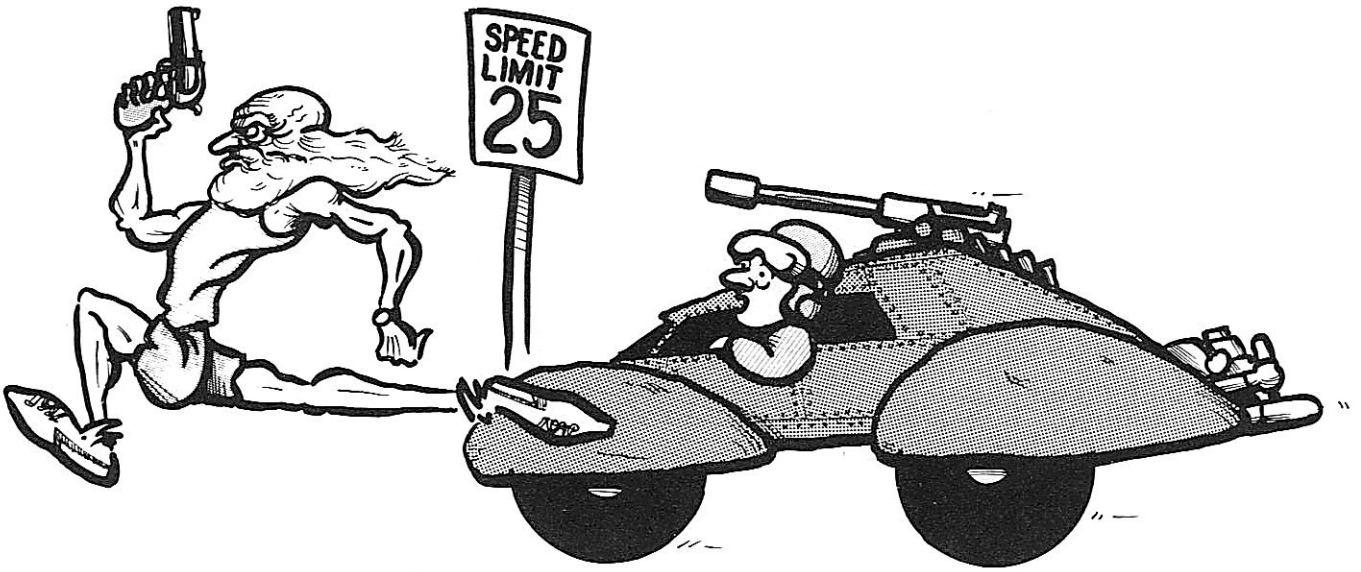

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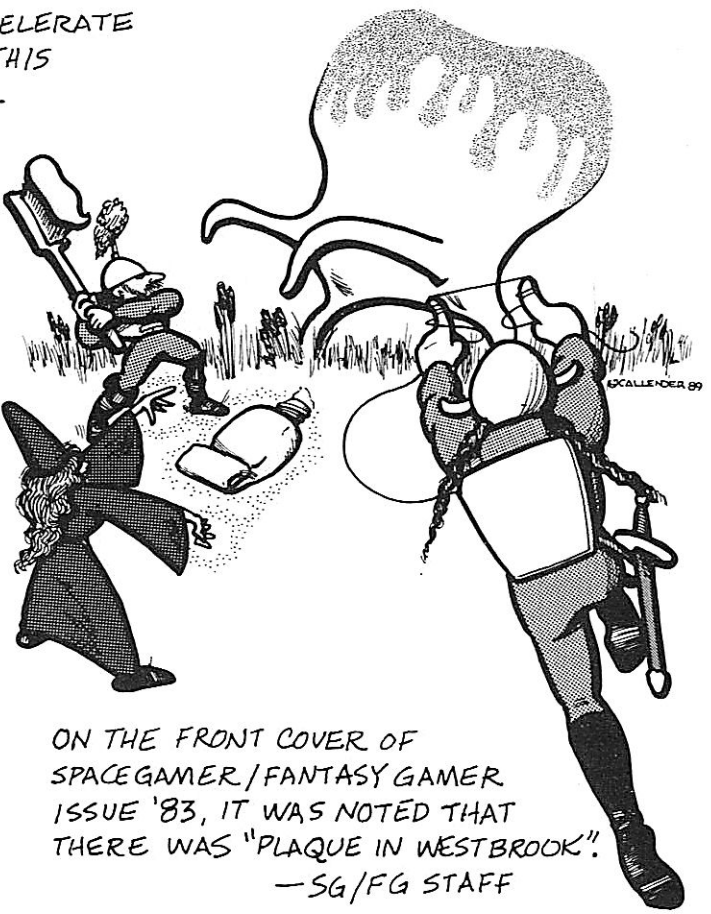
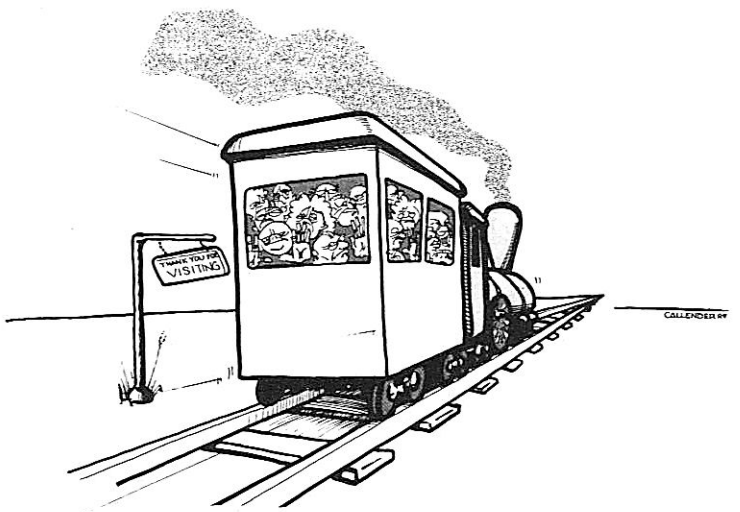
IN CAR WARS (SJG) A PEDESTRIAN CAN ACCELERATE TO 25 MPH IN ONE SECOND AND MAINTAIN THIS SPEED INDEFINITELY. — JOSEPH ZAEPFEL



ON THE FRONT COVER OF SPACEGAMER/FANTASY GAMER ISSUE '83, IT WAS NOTED THAT THERE WAS "PLAQUE IN WESTBROOK".
—SG/FG STAFF



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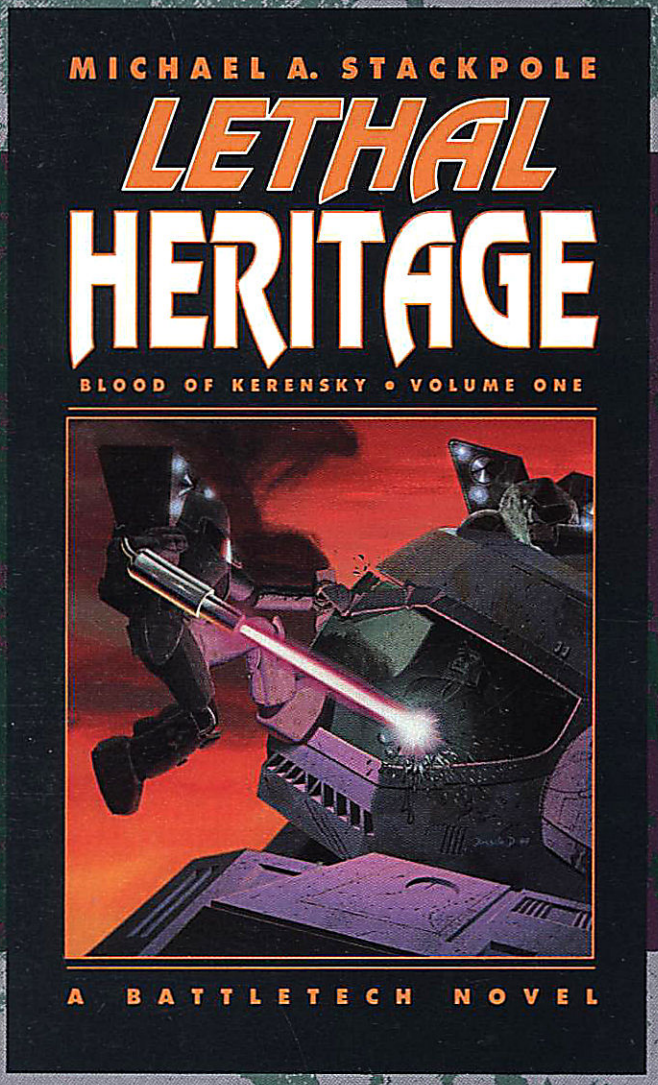

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